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I.

A PARISIAN house is a little world in itself. Some abodes in the great capital of France strongly resemble bee-hives. The busy hum of labour resounds there night and day, and a different calling is plied on each floor. But apart from the dwellings occupied by artisans, how many strange events are constantly occurring, and how many strange people dwell in the buildings which line the more fashionable thoroughfares! These houses are still comparatively new : they have no history, or none save that of the contractor who made his fortune by building them—the every-day story of a man coming to Paris in wooden shoes, and dying a millionaire. None of their occupants are ministers or academicians ; none of them have ever conspired or written a masterpiece. The buildings themselves are too respectable in appearance to harbour disreputable characters, and too carefully kept to take fire. As they have never gained any notoriety, newspaper reporters know nothing about them, and as they are all very much alike, passers-by do not pause to look at them. And yet behind these majestic *facades*, people love and hate : here one man hoards his gold, here another squanders his wealth. Pride, envy, avarice, idleness, and indeed all the cardinal sins, can abide here, providing they pay their rent.

Strange dramas are not unfrequently enacted in these houses—not thrilling ones perhaps, in which the traitor delivers threatening speeches in a bombastic manner, in which the noble father solemnly blesses his offspring, while injured innocence plaintively relates its wrongs—but dramas which do not always end like those on the stage, where crime is invariably punished and virtue rewarded before the curtain falls.

This is the substance of what two well dressed young men were saying as they walked up the Boulevard Haussmann, side by side, one November evening. It was past midnight, but the weather was delightful, and they were returning home from the opera on foot, smoking their cigars and relating their achievements in love and war, like M. de Coonnas and M. de la Môle in Dumas' "Reine Margot." Indeed they bore a striking resemblance to the heroes of Dumas' romance in many other respects. One of them was tall and powerfully built, with a dark complexion, long moustache, and erect bearing. His companion, a fair-haired young man of medium height, slender figure and distinguished appearance, would, like La Môle, certainly have had no difficulty in winning the favour of Marguerite of Navarre.

"Here we are nearly at your house," remarked the tall, dark-complexioned gentleman. "As I have come so far with you, you certainly ought to walk back to the club with me."

"No, indeed," exclaimed the other. "We have gossiped and philosophised enough this evening. I am sleepy, and intend to go straight to bed."

"That may be all very well for you, who are in love; but I have no idea of going home at an hour when people who know what real enjoyment is, are just going out."

"What makes you think I am in love?"

"Oh, that is evident enough. You have not been yourself for three months or more. Something has wrought a great change in my friend, Albert Doutrelaise. You shut yourself up like a hermit, and when one does happen to meet you, it is only in the most virtuous places."

"At the opera, for instance," interrupted the fair-haired young fellow, laughing.

"Bah! once is not always. Do you wish me to tell you why you went out this evening, and whom you expected to meet?"

"I won't trouble you to do so."

"And why you are in such haste now to get up to your rooms on the fourth floor?"

"Courtaumer, my friend, you bore me."

"So you absolutely forbid me to peep over the wall into your private life. Very well; we will say no more about it. But let us talk of something else. What was I saying just now! Oh yes, I recollect. I was remarking that I should like to know what was going on in many Parisian dwellings, yours among the number. But you ought to know yours pretty thoroughly by this time. Describe it to me. I am sure you could give me a truthful portrait of each of the inmates of No. 319, as doorkeepers say. And speaking of doorkeepers, suppose you begin by describing yours."

"That is an easy task. He is old, ugly, and toothless. He only reads the Radical papers, and I fancy he has taken very high orders in the society of Freemasons. He has a daughter who plays the piano and who intends to come out upon the stage. His name is Cyrille Marchefroid."

"An admirable description. Evidently, your connection is not of the most agreeable character."

"We have no association whatever. I never speak to him, and he does not even bow to me."

"Good! I understand it now; he hates you. But go on with your description. We will begin with the first floor, and you can sketch your portraits as hastily as you please."

"Well, on the first floor resides the landlord in person, the illustrious Matapan, the possessor of a dozen millions, made in foreign lands by selling no one knows what—negroes, so envious people say."

"I know him. At least, he has been pointed out to me in the Champs-Elysées. Is he married?"

"No; he lives alone with his valet—an ebony-hued rascal whom he must have brought with him from the Indies—and with a chest full of gold and precious stones, so people pretend. He has, however, only been living for a month on the first floor. Before the fifteenth of October, he occupied the second storey, and Monsieur de la Calprenède, who now lives on the second floor, occupied the first."

"What induced them to make the change?"

"I don't know, upon my word ! Possibly Monsieur de la Calprenède found his rent too high."

"But he is rich."

"He has been, and I suppose still is so, though he has greatly cut down his expenditure of late."

"I heard at the club that his son Julien has squandered a good deal of his money. If he goes on at the present rate, and his father continues to pay his debts every year, his sister will be obliged to die an old maid for want of a dowry. She may be able to dispense with one, however, as she is certainly charming ; in fact, I don't think she will ever go begging for suitors. At least, I know one who—"

"Jacques, no poaching upon my manor, I entreat."

"So you confess at last. Now, I'll say no more to you about your love affairs, and since the people on the second floor are so near your heart, I will allow you to pass on to the third."

"The third floor lacks prestige, being essentially plebeian in every respect. Monsieur Bourleroy, who has retired from business after amassing a fortune as a wholesale druggist, cannot console himself for having failed to receive a decoration. His heir-presumptive is a thorough radical, while Madame Bourleroy has remained a moderate republican : Mademoiselle Bourleroy has no political opinions, but would willingly become a member of the aristocracy, should a handsome nobleman ask her hand in marriage. If you are matrimonially inclined, my dear fellow, I am quite sure that they are very well off, and I know that their Herminie is an only daughter."

"Thanks, my dear friend, I'm not quite ready for such a step at present. I don't know how I may feel ten years hence, but it is now my intention to enjoy myself as only a bachelor can in Paris."

"My life of gaiety is over," said Albert, a trifle sadly.

"That's very evident. There is nothing left for you but to marry, and I advise you to do so as soon as possible. Go in, my dear fellow, and console yourself for not having seen your sweetheart at the opera by gazing at her windows—you can see them from yours, can't you ? Shall I see you to-morrow at breakfast ?"

"I don't know. Good-night."

"By the way, is it true that Mademoiselle de la Calprenède's name is Arlette ?"

This time the exasperated lover shut the door in his friend's face. Albert Doutrelaise was now beyond the reach of his comrade's indiscreet questions, but he was not a little surprised to find himself in profound darkness. The doorkeeper, on extinguishing the gas at midnight, usually left a lamp burning in the hall, and a candle beside it for each tenant : but on this particular evening, he had neglected to take this precaution, and Albert, not caring to wake him, decided to find his way up without a light. He was familiar with the staircase, and had no fear of losing his way ; so taking hold of the balustrade he slowly and cautiously began the ascent.

He had speedily forgotten Jacques de Courtaumer's jests, but he was already thinking of the person whose name his friend had mentioned on leaving him, and he paid little heed to what was passing around him. Had he been less absorbed, he would have heard the stairs creak under the tread of some one in advance of him, probably some other tenant, obliged like himself to find his way up in the dark ; but even if this sound had attracted his attention it would probably have caused him little or no anxiety, the house being one of those in which one is exposed to constant

meetings. Moreover, Albert Doutrelaise was not the only occupant who returned home late : young Calprenède and young Bourleroy being troubled by no compunctions of conscience whenever they disturbed the slumber of the doorkeeper. So Albert went on leisurely and noiselessly, for he was not very heavy, and there was a carpet on the stairs. The first landing was reached without his meeting anyone, but a little further on he came in contact with a living obstacle, and at the same instant a hand clutched his arm, a hand of steel, with a vice-like grip which drew from him a cry of pain.

Doutrelaise was certainly not a coward, but he had nerves, and darkness is not good for the nerves. "Midnight courage is the most rare of all," said Napoleon, who knew what he was talking about.

Doutrelaise did not exactly lose his head in his surprise, but it took him a second or two to regain his composure. "Who is there? What do you want?" he asked quickly.

Receiving no response, he aimed a blow at his assailant—which proved effectual, for his arm was suddenly released. Then he in turn attempted to seize hold of the person who had ventured to touch him, and, as he did so, he came in contact with a clenched hand which he attempted to grasp, but which escaped him. All he could do was to clutch at something this hand held—an object which seemed very like a chain, and at which he pulled so stoutly that a portion of it remained between his fingers. At that moment his self-possession suddenly returned to him, and it seemed to him advisable not to continue this absurd combat any longer.

His companion appeared to have no evil designs, since, instead of returning to the charge, he remained against the wall without making any movement or saying a word. He was probably far more frightened than his assailant, and there could be no reasonable doubt but what he was one of the inmates of the mansion. At all events he was not a thief, for it would have been an easy matter for him to have allowed Doutrelaise to pass. He could scarcely have failed to hear him coming, and he would only have been obliged to step into one of the doorway recesses, to avoid meeting him. All this flashed through Albert's mind in a second, and, without wasting any more time in seeking an explanation of this strange incident, he cleared the rest of the staircase in three bounds. On the second flight he paused for an instant to listen, and discovered that the person he had left behind had begun to ascend the stairs again with a slow and measured tread. "Nonsense!" said Doutrelaise to himself; "I am certainly very foolish to trouble myself about such a trifle. Probably it is Bourleroy's servant, returning late from a wineshop." He continued his ascent, though not without lending an attentive ear to what was going on behind him; and soon he heard a key turn in a lock and then a door open and gently close again. "I know who it is now," murmured Doutrelaise. "It's Julien de la Calprenède, returning half intoxicated, as usual. It's a lucky thing that I didn't shout, 'Thief!' The doorkeeper would have been only too glad of such an opportunity to create a scandal. He hates the nobility, and Monsieur de la Calprenède is a count. The whole neighbourhood would have been apprised of the affair, and our amiable Cerberus would have told the tale to suit his own fancy. Still, Julien is really very wrong to act as he does. The first time I see him I shall take the liberty of lecturing him a little. I know a young lady who would be very grateful to me for bringing her brother back into the right path. Where did she spend the evening? The count was to have taken her to the opera, but they were not there. She is probably asleep ere now. I sha'n't even have

the pleasure of contemplating the light of her lamp to-night. Ah ! if she thought of me as often as I think of her, Mademoiselle Arlette wouldn't sleep much. Courtaumer is right—I *am* in love, and the fact is apparent to everyone."

This soliloquy brought Albert Doutrelaise to the fourth floor, where he occupied a suite of rooms much too large for him, for he only kept a valet and a cook. He had taken them by chance, and had often thought of leaving them, but had been deterred by a reason which would have made him willing to endure every imaginable inconvenience. M. de la Calprenède lived in the house, and M. de la Calprenède had a daughter. He had been rich, but was no longer considered so ; while Doutrelaise had come into possession of an income of thirty-six thousand francs on attaining his majority. The name, it is true, was not written with an apostrophe after the D, and he was not the man to ennable himself by a trick of orthography ; but though not of noble birth he had the manners, and, what is better still, the sentiments of a true nobleman. Mademoiselle de la Calprenède would certainly not have contracted a *mesalliance* by wedding him. And in case he married, there would not be the slightest necessity for him to change his residence, for he had room enough for a large family. The house had been built in accordance with the plans of a gentleman who cared much less about deriving a large income from his property, than about providing himself with comfortable quarters. The house faced the street, and behind it extended a courtyard, enclosed by a wing on either side. An entire floor was occupied by each tenant, and the arrangement of each of the four floors was alike in every particular ; the reception rooms being in front, and the bedrooms to the right and left of the vestibule in the wings overlooking the courtyard.

Doutrelaise used but one of these wings, the other serving as a repository for his library and his works of art, for he was much more fond of books and pictures than display. The wing in which he slept, however, was directly opposite that occupied by the Count de la Calprenède and his children. Doutrelaise had consigned his valet to a room in the other wing, and did not require him to wait for him later than midnight. That evening, especially, he felt no desire to call him, for he was anxious to see what was going on in the count's apartments. His adventure on the staircase had excited his curiosity, and he really wished to satisfy himself that the person he had just met was young Julien de la Calprenède. To do this, he had only to station himself at one of his windows and watch. There without a light, he could see, and not be seen. He knew that the first room in the left wing belonged to Julien, and also that it was separated by a kind of study from the count's sleeping apartment ; then came two large dressing-rooms, and finally the bed-room of Mademoiselle de la Calprenède. Consequently, he expected to find the first mentioned apartment lighted up, and the others shrouded in darkness, the count and his daughter being in the habit of retiring at an early hour when they stopped at home ; but he was considerably surprised to see that there was no light in any one of the rooms on the second floor. "That's strange," he muttered. "It was certainly not more than three minutes ago that I heard the count's door opened by the man I met on the stairs. It would be impossible for him to undress in so short a time. What has become of him ? I shall wait until I see some sign of his presence ; for if it was not Julien, it was—a thief ! But no, what nonsense ! A thief could not have the key of the count's apartment in his pocket."

While indulging in this soliloquy, Albert watched with all his eyes. He soon became accustomed to the partial darkness, and fancied he could see a form slowly passing and repassing the windows in front.

"I understand now," he muttered, "Julien does not feel any inclination to sleep and is wandering about his room like a soul in distress. And yet, one would hardly take that man to be Julien, he is scarcely as tall. Bah! it's difficult to judge at such a distance. Ah, now he has disappeared; he has made up his mind to go to bed probably. There only remains for me to do the same." Doutrelaise was about to leave his observatory, when he suddenly exclaimed: "Why no, there he is in the study—he approaches the window. One would swear that he is going to kneel. Well, all this is quite beyond my comprehension. Now he disappears again. Really, I have had enough of this. I'm not going to spend the night in watching the movements of a young fool who has taken more wine than is good for him. I shall meet him to-morrow at the club or somewhere else, and I will then ask him to explain these nocturnal wanderings. That will be a much better way of satisfying my curiosity than remaining here watching in the cold."

On arriving at this conclusion, Doutrelaise proceeded to his bedroom, which was the last apartment in the left wing, just as that of Mademoiselle de la Calprenède was the last in the right one. Their windows were consequently directly opposite each other.

Albert's consideration for his valet did not go to the extent of condoning any neglect of duty, and he was always sure to find a good fire and a lighted lamp on returning. On this particular evening, he viewed with no little pleasure the brightly blazing fire, the cigars spread out upon a tray, and a new novel lying open beside a *samovar* in which some boiling water was singing cheerily. "There is nothing like a cup of good tea and a cigar for driving away foolish fancies," he exclaimed, "and it would be sheer folly to attach any importance to that episode on the staircase. I did not fare the worst in the collision, and, by the way, I carried something off with me, some spoil which I have had in my possession for fully a quarter of an hour without thinking of examining it. Let me look at it a little closer. This is stranger than ever," he exclaimed, after approaching the lamp. "I have purloined a superb ornament, a magnificent opal, handsomely mounted and surrounded by small diamonds. I wondered if I had not come in contact with a thief, but really, I appear to have been playing the part of a thief myself."

The bauble had evidently formed part of a necklace or a bracelet, and Doutrelaise had broken it off in his attempt to seize hold of the hand which held it, for two of the connecting links that had formerly united the stories had been torn asunder. Albert examined the ornament carefully in the hope of discovering some mark which would assist him in solving the mystery. But the more he studied it, the more clouded his face became. "There is but one explanation," he murmured: "Julien plays a good deal and Monsieur de la Calprenède doesn't grant him a very large allowance. If he has lost any considerable amount, he is certainly unable to pay it, and instead of confessing his folly to his father, he took this necklace—it must be a necklace, for opals are not mounted in bracelets—which undoubtedly belonged to his mother, intending to pawn it. I am thankful that he did not succeed in his attempt; for he could not have done so, as he brought the ornament back again. There is yet time to check him in this unfortunate undertaking. To-morrow morning I will pay him an early call, and offer him the money he is in need of. I don't suppose he would

refuse me the pleasure of obliging him. Still, who knows? He is proud, like all the Calprenèdes, and he has perhaps discovered that I love his sister. Nevertheless, I shall make the attempt, and I hope he will not take offence. It won't be difficult to broach the subject as I shall be under the necessity of returning this family jewel, and apologizing for treating him so unceremoniously on the staircase. Now I think of it, I wonder why he did not make a more vigorous defence. I had no idea he could be so patient. He probably feared that he would be obliged to explain how he happened to have this necklace in his possession. But why didn't he put it in his pocket? Another mystery. But nonsense, it will all be cleared up to-morrow."

Having arrived at this conclusion, Doutrelaise locked the jewel up in a drawer, and began thinking of a different matter. For the first time in his life, he devotedly loved a woman in every way worthy of his affection. He was neither an unsophisticated nor an impulsive man, but for more than six months he had asked for nothing better than to renounce the celibacy which he had once held so dear and bow his head to the marriage yoke. It was Arlette de la Calprenède who had wrought this miracle. They had chanced to meet one evening in a house where Albert never set foot more than twice a year, and afterwards they had met frequently, for the young man profited by the fact that they lived in the same house. He made the most of the opportunities thus afforded, and although the count led a very retired life, he received Albert very cordially. But that evening everything had gone wrong. Mademoiselle de la Calprenède had not appeared at the opera in accordance with Albert's anticipations, and he was about to retire disconsolately to bed, when suddenly a light appeared in the young girl's window. By some unusual chance, the curtains had not been lowered, and Albert saw a figure which made his heart beat faster. "Where can she come from at this hour?" he asked himself. "She was with her father, perhaps. But no, there's no light in the count's room, and that good-for-nothing Julien certainly would not think of calling his sister in his present condition. Ah, she is kneeling, she is praying—for him, perhaps."

Albert was right. Mademoiselle de la Calprenède was praying with her hands clasped, and her head bowed like a criminal before her judge. She seemed to be weeping despairingly. What sorrow could she have? What trials had she to bear? In society, she always seemed gay; and at her age a girl is not an adept in concealing her feelings. "Can it be her brother's conduct that distresses her?" thought Doutrelaise. "The unfortunate fellow has perhaps already brought dishonour upon his name. It is quite time for me to interfere."

The prayer was short and fervent. Mademoiselle de la Calprenède rose and approached the window; but on perceiving the young man, who had not thought of leaving his place, she quickly retreated. The curtains fell almost instantly, and nothing more could be seen. Albert returned to his arm-chair to dream of the radiant vision that had just vanished. His reverie was a prolonged one, and he resolved to put an end to all further doubts and uncertainty on the morrow by making a formal request for the hand of Mademoiselle de la Calprenède, for he was much more interested in his project of marriage than in Julien's vagaries; but before going to sleep, it never once occurred to him that the opal is a jewel that brings misfortune upon its possessor.

II.

ALTHOUGH Albert Doutrelaise had retired at a very late hour, he woke up early the next morning. Lovers, as a rule, require very little sleep.

He had learnt the night before that the girl he loved had deep sorrows which she revealed only to her God : he knew that she wept in secret, and that she prayed for strength to bear her trials, and he hoped that her thoughts turned to him, for on rising from her knees she had approached her window and looked in the direction of his. He could not doubt but what he had divined the cause of her grief, and he promised himself that he would speedily bring Julien back into the right path. While he was reflecting upon the best mode of procedure, his valet came in to light the fire, as he did every morning at nine o'clock. At the same time he brought a bundle of letters and papers, which he deposited on the table by the side of the bed. One of the letters was addressed in a handwriting which Albert recognized at once. "What can that simpleton Courtaumer have to say to me?" he muttered, as he glanced at the address. "We parted at midnight, and he sends me a message before daybreak. Something serious must have happened. He is as quarrelsome as the devil, and possibly he got into some difficulty last night. Let us see."

On opening the epistle he read the following enigmatical words : "An utter defeat, my dear fellow. The combat has ceased for want of the sinews of war, though I don't regard myself as finally beaten, by any means. If you are in a position to furnish me with fresh supplies, drop in after breakfast, between one and two o'clock. If you can't, we will say no more about it. I salute you. Your faithful comrade, Jacques de Courtaumer,"

"Fool!" growled Doutrelaise, "he has been losing again, and a pretty sum evidently, since he is obliged to call upon me. Upon my word ! he would have done better to have remained in the navy than to abandon his profession and come to Paris to squander his fortune. I shall help him, of course, but really this occurs a little too often. I am not a millionaire. Besides, why doesn't he apply to his brother ? But what nonsense ! his brother is a magistrate, a married man and the father of a family. He would be furiously angry, and would refuse to lend him a farthing. There is really no one else but me to extricate him from his embarrassment. But I am going to make him promise, upon his word of honour, not to begin again." Thereupon, Albert crumpled up his friend's letter and prepared to open another. "Whose writing is this?" he murmured, as he tried to decipher a few lines written in a very irregular hand. "Heaven grant that it is not a request for another loan !" But the signature made him open his eyes in astonishment, "Julien de la Calprenède !" he exclaimed. "Ah, this is quite a surprise ! This is the first time in his life that he ever wrote to me. Something of a very serious nature must have occurred—and yet all he says is : 'My dear Sir :—You will greatly oblige me if you will kindly meet me at the Café de la Paix, at 11 A.M. this morning, in the breakfast-room on the right, as you enter the establishment. I have a great favour to ask of you.' Another loan, as I supposed. So I was not mistaken last night : it was really he. To what straits must he be reduced to think of pawning a family jewel which probably did not belong to him ! But I shall be very glad to help him out of his trouble. He can have no idea of the pleasure his application gives me. His sister

shall grieve no more, for I am sure that it was on her brother's account she w^tcpt. A strange idea this to ask me to meet him at a café. Why did he not call upon me? It would have been much easier."

In the meantime, Doutrelaise had sprung out of bed, and begun to dress. In answer to his inquiry, his valet informed him that it was Julien who had left the letter—Julien already dressed to go out, although he seldom or never rose before noon.

This information strengthened Albert in the belief that the young man's position was a desperate one, so he hastened over his toilet. At half-past ten he was ready, and he started out, not forgetting to place in his pocket the opal the disappearance of which must necessarily cause young Calprenède no little anxiety. "Who knows?" Albert said to himself; "he perhaps only wishes to ask me to return it to him. He suspects that I was the person he met in the dark, and he did not discover until this morning that the jewel was missing from the necklace. I will wait and see if he shows any inclination to broach the subject, and if he doesn't, I will speak to him about it."

As Doutrelaise went down the stairs he met young Anatole Bourleroy, who was evidently returning after a night of dissipation, for his face was haggard and his clothing disordered. The bow exchanged between them was decidedly cool. On the second landing below Albert found himself face to face with M. Matapan; and he was not a little surprised to see that he was ringing at the door of M. de la Calprenède's apartment. The nabob had a radiant air, and was arrayed with an elegance that became him well. He greeted his tenant with a wave of the hand and a friendly smile. The wave of the hand clearly signified: "I haven't time to talk with you this morning;" so Doutrelaise passed on, saying to himself: "What is he doing here at this hour? The count doesn't receive guests in the morning, or at least he only sees persons who call on business, and I don't suppose that Monsieur Matapan collects his rents in person—besides, it is more than a month since quarter-day."

He heard the door open, and a short parley took place between one of the count's servants and M. Matapan, who was then admitted. "Wonders will never cease," thought Albert. "It is quite evident that he was expected. I did not fancy there was much congeniality between the landlord and that tenant. This foreign millionaire doesn't belong to the same sphere as the Calprenèdes; and yet, here he is calling upon them before mid-day in the most unceremonious fashion—hardly though, for his toilet has evidently been made with the greatest care. All this is inexplicable, unless—and why not?—unless Julien has conceived the unfortunate idea of borrowing money of him."

To tell the truth, the love-sick Doutrelaise was greatly exercised in mind about this early visit, and yet he had no just cause to distrust M. Matapan, who had always treated him with the greatest possible courtesy. In fact, the landlord was on excellent terms with all his tenants, and it would have been extremely ungracious in them to reproach him for living according to his tastes. He certainly had a right to love solitude, especially as he was a bachelor; to eat sometimes at home, sometimes at a restaurant; to go off unexpectedly, without telling any one where he was bound, or when he intended to return; to live like a miser for months together, and then scatter his gold right and left whenever the fancy seized him. On reflection, Doutrelaise decided that he was attaching undue importance to a very trivial incident, and by the time he

had reached the street door, his thoughts had taken an entirely different course.

The doorkeeper chanced to be standing on the threshold, as solemn and sanctimonious as usual. Doutrelaise, who very rarely accosted him, suddenly resolved to obtain some information from him in a roundabout way concerning the encounter of the evening before. "Monsieur Marchefroid," he remarked carelessly, "I narrowly escaped breaking my neck on the stairs last evening. The lamp was not lighted as usual, and I could not find my candle."

"You surprise me, sir," replied the doorkeeper. "I lighted the lamp myself before going to bed."

"Then one of the tenants must have extinguished it when he came in."

"Was it for you, sir, that I opened the door at half past twelve?"

"Yes."

"Then no one could have touched the lamp, for I lighted it at midnight, and from that time until you came in, no one entered the house."

"You must be mistaken, for on going upstairs I came in contact with some one who could have entered but a minute or two in advance of me."

"I assure you, sir, that such a thing was impossible. I was in bed, but not asleep; I was reading, and I am certain that I didn't open the door until you came in."

"That's very strange. I am perfectly sure that I met a gentleman on the stairs between the first and second floor. I was unable to recognize him in the darkness, and I did not speak to him, but I thought it was young Monsieur de la Calprenède."

"Ah! he comes and goes at all hours of the night. I have been intending to complain to the landlord for some time. The young man's habits are not suited to a respectable house. But he wasn't here at midnight. He rang at a quarter past two, went up to his room, and left the house again twenty minutes afterwards. Nor is this all; at six o'clock he repeated the performance. If monsieur does not believe me, he can ask the young gentleman himself," the majestic doorkeeper added, by way of conclusion, and with an air of offended dignity.

"I believe you, of course, Monsieur Marchefroid," replied Albert; "besides Monsieur de la Calprenède has an undoubted right to come and go when he pleases. Only take care in future that I'm not obliged to find my way up in the dark."

And to put an end to a conversation which had lasted too long already, Doutrelaise went off. To reach the Café de la Paix he merely had to follow the Boulevard Haussmann as far as the Rue Auber, and as it was only half past ten there was no need of haste. So he walked slowly, devoting his leisure to reflecting on the information just received. This was such a direct contradiction of the conclusions he had arrived at the previous evening, that he was tempted to believe that the doorkeeper had not told the truth, or at least only a portion of it. Julien de la Calprenède must have returned for the first time a little in advance of Doutrelaise; still that would not prevent him ringing again at two o'clock if he had gone out again in the meantime. House porters sleep soundly, and M. Marchefroid while dozing over his paper might have mechanically pulled the cord that opened the door almost without being aware of it. The more Albert thought over the matter, the more firmly he was persuaded that he had solved the mystery. But suddenly, a very forcible objection occurred to him. "I had been talking at least ten minutes to Jacques de Courtaumer on the doorstep

before I decided to ring," he said to himself. "If Julien had gone in while we were talking on the side-walk I should certainly have seen him, and if he had entered the house a quarter of an hour before I did, I shouldn't have met him on the staircase. He could have reached his room long before."

While viewing the affair under this new aspect, he noticed two women walking swiftly along side by side on the otherside of the street. One of them was dressed very plainly, and a thick veil concealed her features; but all the same there was an air of remarkable elegance about her. Her companion was evidently a servant, and when she turned, perhaps intentionally, he recognised Mademoiselle de la Calprenède's maid and by induction he also recognised Mademoiselle Arlette herself. Where was she going? To take a music or drawing lesson? This was the thought that first occurred to him; but he quickly recollect ed that Mademoiselle Arlette was over twenty and that her education had been completed eighteen months before. Then he remembered that he had just seen M. Matapan enter the count's apartments, and the idea that the young lady might have taken a walk to avoid an introduction to that gentleman occurred to him. But this supposition seemed too absurd to be entertained for a moment. However on reaching the square formed by the intersection of the Boulevard Haussmann and the Boulevard Malesherbes, Mademoiselle Arlette and her attendant turned to the left, and Doutrelaise saw them enter the church of Saint-Augustine. The mystery was solved now. The young girl had gone out to pray.

He was not surprised at this, for she was very devout; but he recollect ed having seen her on her knees in her room only a few hours before, and he again said to himself that some great misfortune must be threatening her or hers; that her only hope was in God, and that she only thought of imploring His aid. And Doutrelaise, who thought he had discovered the cause of her grief, swore that he would speedily allay it.

He fancied that all that was necessary was a conversation with the brother who caused her so much anxiety, and knowing this brother was awaiting him at the Cafè de la Paix, he hastened there, walking with such swiftness that he arrived considerably in advance of the young fellow he expected to see. It was not yet eleven o'clock, and the establishment was empty. In Paris, late breakfasts are the fashion, and the waiters, who knew Doutrelaise, were surprised to see him appear before noon. He seated himself at the end of the room in a corner where one could talk without fear of being overheard, and while waiting for Julien, as he intended to play the host, he ordered a couple of dozen oysters as a sort of announcement of his intention. But the oysters arrived before the guest, and Doutrelaise had plenty of time to prepare for conversation. Twenty minutes or so had elapsed before Julien made his appearance. He was a tall young fellow, as dark as his sister was fair. He had irregular features, singularly changeful eyes, and a restless, nervous physiognomy, with an air of haughtiness that chilled one a trifle at first. This morning he was paler than usual, and his haggard face showed plainly enough that he had passed a sleepless night. When he perceived Doutrelaise he hastened towards him, and it is needless to say that he was most cordially received. Albert offered him both hands, and without giving him time to utter the slightest thanks, exclaimed: "I received your letter this morning. Thank you for having thought of me. Consider your request granted, whatever it may be. But let us breakfast first; I am famishing."

"That isn't the case with me," murmured Julien.

"I know why, you had a late supper last night. I am very sorry for it, but I shall certainly quarrel with you if you don't help me in despatching these oysters, a cold partridge or two, and some wine that will restore your appetite."

"I can refuse you nothing, my dear Doutrelaise, as you have taken the trouble to come here."

"Nonsense! I was delighted at the prospect of having your company at breakfast. But why didn't you call on me instead of writing?"

"I was obliged to go out early, and I didn't wish to disturb you."

"You wouldn't have done so, for I slept but little last night, and I fancy you did not get much more rest than I did. The fact is I generally leave you at the club when I go home nowadays. Did the game last until the morning?"

"Probably, but I did not remain until it ended."

"Then you must have been winning, for a man never leaves the table while he is losing. He desires to retrieve his misfortune, and so plays on and on."

"That was the case with one of your friends last night."

"Monsieur de Courtaumer, eh? I suspected as much. How much did he lose?"

"About twenty-five thousand francs, I believe."

"A nice amount," said Doutrelaise, with a slight grimace. "Courtaumer isn't lucky at *baccarat*, and he would do as well to abjure it altogether. But how did you come off, my dear fellow?"

"I didn't play."

"What, have you become suddenly wise?"

"Not exactly; but I had no money, and—I owe a good deal."

"Still, it is a proof of wisdom not to run a risk of increasing one's indebtedness."

"I might have done so, however, had there not been reasons which obliged me to abstain."

"Nevertheless your conduct is extremely meritorious."

"You would not say that if you knew my reasons."

"I don't ask them, my dear fellow; and I repeat that I am entirely at your service."

"Thank you; but before accepting your offer, allow me to explain. It isn't only a pecuniary service that I want to ask of you."

"So much the better. I and my purse are equally at your disposal."

"This is the position in which I find myself. A person has offended, yes, insulted me, and I desire to challenge him."

"I will act as your second, of course, if you desire it."

"I expected no less of you; but that isn't all. My opponent is also my creditor; I owe him a debt of honour, and I cannot fight with him until I have paid him."

"Such a thing would certainly be contrary to all the usual rules of duelling. He would probably refuse to accept your challenge, as he would have a perfect right to do. But you can pay him to-day, if you like."

"You can scarcely imagine what a service you are rendering me," murmured Julien. "Thanks to you, I shall be able to treat the scoundrel as he deserves."

"How has he wronged you, and to whom do you refer?"

"It is a matter connected with my sister, and any reconciliation or arbitration is entirely out of the question. She has been spoken of in a manner that displeases me."

"Then you, of course, have a perfect right to demand satisfaction. But who has dared—"

"Who? A scoundrel you know, at least by sight, for he belongs to our club and resides in the same house as ourselves—Anatole Bourleroy."

"What! that vulgar idiot! Really, this is too much, and he deserves a punishment I should be only too glad to administer in person. But your father has certainly never done him the honour to receive him, and if he has ever bowed to Mademoiselle de la Calprenède, it is probably because he has met her going up or down the staircase. What can he have said about her?"

"Nothing against her character. If he had dared to slander her I should have knocked him down without any ceremony; but he has indulged in insulting language respecting all of us—my sister, my father, and myself."

"Are you sure of it?"

"I heard it. Last night I reached the club very late. Three or four gentlemen were sitting round the fire in the red room talking. Their backs were turned towards me, and they did not see me when I entered. I recognised Bourleroy's voice, however, and he was telling the others that my father moved last month because he had become so reduced in circumstances as to be unable to pay his rent."

"If that is all he said, his foolish tattle isn't worthy of notice," replied Doutrelaise, shrugging his shoulders. "Every one knows that it isn't true."

"Whether it is true or not matters little. I won't allow that conceited fool to meddle with my affairs. Besides, he did not confine himself to this revelation, but added that there was a very easy way for us to extricate ourselves from our embarrassment, as we need only marry my sister to a man who was sufficiently rich and sufficiently infatuated to take her without a dowry, and he declared that this man had been found."

"And did he mention the gentleman's name?" inquired Albert, turning pale.

"Yes; he spoke of our landlord, Monsieur Matapan. Think of the insolence of this fellow Bourleroy, who dares to intimate that my father would be a party to any such infamous bargain—for it would be a bargain. Matapan is fifty, and a perfect Blue-Beard. No one knows his origin, it is true; but it is evident that he is not of noble birth, and that in itself is enough to make the honour of an alliance with our family an impossibility—"

Doutrelaise started. Neither was he a nobleman.

"To pretend that the Count de la Calprenède would sacrifice his daughter for the sake of this old *parvenu's* millions is an insult to all of us, and is not to be tolerated for a moment," resumed Julien.

"And yet you did tolerate it?"

"You know why," replied Julien. "On the night before last Bourleroy won six thousand francs from me at écarté. I have lost heavily during the past two months, and I was obliged to ask a few days' indulgence. I was his debtor, and consequently obliged to be silent. I had sufficient self-control to leave the room. He did not suspect for a moment that I had heard him, or that I had been there. I returned home half frantic with rage, resolved to tell my father everything. Then I reflected that it was a matter in which I alone should act. So I went back to the club, hoping to find there some friend who would lend me the six thousand francs. In that case I intended to pay him at once, and then call him to account.

But there was no one there to whom I could apply for such a loan, and Bourleroy had left, so after waiting until four o'clock, I went home again and wrote to you."

"You acted wisely, my dear Julien. I will lend you the money with pleasure; but allow me to give you a bit of advice! I think Monsieur Bourleroy must receive a lesson; but I think it would be unfortunate for Mademoiselle de la Calprenède's name to be mixed up in the quarrel in any way. I will devise a pretext, and if you will kindly consent, I will gladly take charge of the whole affair."

"You forget, my dear sir, that this does not affect you in any way."

"Pardon me; I have had the honour of being your father's guest, and I have the greatest respect for him and for all who bear his name."

"I don't doubt it; but you are neither a relative nor a connection. What right have you to avenge an insult meant for us?"

If Doutrelaise could have revealed what was in his heart, this rather ungracious question would have received a prompt reply; but Julien's tone did not encourage him to tell the truth. "The right of a friend, since I have no other," he replied, without betraying how deeply the young man's words had wounded him.

"That doesn't suffice, and I shouldn't be worthy of your friendship if I yielded my place to you. I am the person to challenge Bourleroy—if you will really do me the favour I ask of you."

"Can you doubt it?" inquired Doutrelaise, drawing out his pocket-book.

"No, certainly not, since you have promised; but not here, I beg of you. There are some acquaintances of ours sitting not far from us."

"As you please," rejoined Albert. "Let us drink our wine, and talk of something else."

"Certainly, and of the ladies if you like. I forgot that you were in love."

"How do you know that?" exclaimed Doutrelaise.

"All your friends say so, and you blush whenever we refer to the subject. So they must be right."

"That is only one of Courtaumer's jests. He cannot understand why I like to go to bed early."

"He told me at the club that he escorted you home at midnight."

"Yes, I entered the house a moment after you."

"What! after me? Why I just told you that I didn't return home until two o'clock."

"Is that really so?"

"At a quarter past two, to be more exact."

"That's strange! I thought it was you I met on the staircase."

"In that case I should have seen you."

"No, for the whole scene occurred in the most profound darkness."

"Scene? what scene?"

Albert thereupon proceeded to relate the episode, and his companion listened with the closest attention. "Yours was certainly a flattering conclusion so far as I am concerned," Julien exclaimed at the finish of the narrative. "What could have led you to suppose that I prowl about the staircase at night for the purpose of attacking people?"

"Simply because the man in question, instead of running after me, opened the door of your apartment with a key and went in."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Absolutely certain; I paused five or six steps higher up and heard the key turn in the lock. Naturally, I thought it was you."

Julien's face clouded. "Ah, well," he murmured after a pause, "suppose I told you that this is not the first time some one has entered my room at night in my absence, what would you think then?"

"What would I think?" repeated Doutrelaise. "Why, I should think that the object was robbery." He said this with some little hesitation. His companion's question seemed singular in the extreme, and he wondered if it were not intended to mislead him; for he still persisted in believing that it was really Julien whom he had met on the staircase.

"No, nothing whatever has been stolen from me," La Calprenède replied. "Still, I am almost certain that my room has been entered repeatedly. Articles which I have put in a certain place have been moved, furniture disarranged, and chairs overturned, as if some one had been moving about the room without a light in search of something—"

"Which they have not found, as you have missed nothing. This is certainly very extraordinary."

"One may truly say extraordinary, as it has occurred at least five or six times since we moved; that is to say, since the fifteenth of October."

"But there is a very natural explanation, it seems to me. Your father's valet waits upon you as well, I suppose, and it is probable that in passing through your room—"

"My father keeps no valet now, the cook does not sleep in the house, and my sister's maid would not venture into my room in my absence."

"But how do you know that the intruder confined himself exclusively to your private apartments?"

"Because the next room is occupied by my father, who is a very light sleeper. I, you know, have two rooms—my bedroom and the adjoining study. The intruder never goes beyond that."

"That is the precise place where the person stopped last night."

"How do you know that?"

"The episode on the stairs excited my curiosity. My windows command a view of yours; I watched, and saw a figure pass the windows of your bedroom and then those of the study. I fancied the person knelt—"

"Where? Near the left window?"

"Precisely. Who told you?"

"No one; but there is a small ottoman there which I have frequently found in a different position, and once even overturned. What occurred afterwards?"

"I am unable to say. I was more and more firmly convinced that it was you, and finally I ceased to watch."

"That's unfortunate," said Julien, thoughtfully. "You might, perhaps, have furnished the explanation I have been seeking for more than a month." Then after a moment's silence he inquired: "Do you think my father was in bed?"

"I did not see any light in his bedroom; but I fancied the lamp was still burning in Mademoiselle de la Calprenède's apartment," added Doutrelaise, blushing a little.

Julien again relapsed into silence. He drained a glass of claret abstractedly, then rested his elbow on the table in the attitude of a man who is meditating or dreaming. Albert watched him attentively. The conversation had not changed his opinion; on the contrary, his suspicions had been converted into an absolute certainty by Julien's confession of his indebtedness. He had certainly taken this necklace hoping to raise the necessary money to pay Bourleroy, in order to be able to challenge that young

coxcomb, who had allowed himself to speak disparagingly of Mademoiselle de la Calprenède. The aim excused the means. "To quiet my suspicions, he has invented this story," thought Albert, "but he has probably not discovered that an opal is missing from the necklace, as he went to bed without a light, and must consequently have locked the ornament up without examining it. Now that he is sure of the money to pay his creditor, he will abandon the idea of pawning the jewel; but the six thousand francs I am going to lend him will only satisfy his present necessities; other wants will soon present themselves, and the same temptation will again assail him. The only way to prevent him from yielding to it, is to let him know that I have discovered his secret, and to let him understand that in case of any new misfortunes it would be advisable for him to apply to me instead of raising money upon an article which should be reverently preserved."

While Doutrelaise was reasoning like this, Julien, who had eaten little or nothing, lighted a cigar, without thinking of offering one to his companion. He was evidently deeply troubled in mind since he thus forgot not only his dessert, but also the rules of good breeding. Doutrelaise, who was anxious to broach the important subject, and who had not come for the purpose of regaling himself on a sumptuous repast, refused the various kinds of cheese and fruit which the waiter enumerated one by one in the tone of a school-boy reciting his lessons, and called for coffee and brandy. Doutrelaise was a true Parisian, and naturally of a lively disposition. Love had made him unusually thoughtful for several months, but he still knew how to talk and amuse people when he chose. So he now sketched the portraits of some of the most ridiculous members of the club, and he did this so cleverly as to succeed in diverting his companion's thoughts and in driving the cloud from his brow. This was precisely what he desired, for he wished to take the young man by surprise, and by asking him an unexpected question when he was off his guard to succeed in extorting a confession from him. Julien seemed likely to fall an easy prey to this scheme. He laughed at his companion's jokes, and after drinking a few glasses of kummel began to talk in his turn: "It is terribly wearisome to meet such absurd people every evening," he said, "but to see one's money pass into their hands is even worse. I have a great mind to cut loose from the whole set."

"That is an easy matter; you have only to send in your resignation. I intend doing so, but I take no great credit to myself, for I no longer care for cards."

"You are fortunate," replied Julien. "I have never been able to cure myself of my fondness for play, although lessons have not been wanting."

"This last has been a severe one, truly. It must be hard to find oneself Monsieur Anatole Bourleroy's debtor."

"Yes, it is hard. You can scarcely imagine the agony I have endured for the past two days. But, fortunately, you have come to my help—very fortunately, for in such straits I lose my head, and become capable of doing anything to raise the amount I need—even of robbing some passer-by in the street, or of taking my father's silver to the pawnshop."

"Nonsense, my friend, you will never succeed in convincing me that you would be capable of a dishonest act. But speaking of the pawnshop, I must show you something I have found, and upon which a pawnbroker would lend a very handsome amount, I think," remarked Doutrelaise, fumbling in his pockets.

The moment for striking the long contemplated blow had come. Don-

trelaise's companion evidently suspected nothing, for he sat watching his movements with perfect calmness. Albert fancied the test he had invented would be decisive. "What do you think of this bauble, my dear fellow?" he asked, laying the opal on the table, and gazing at it intently.

Julien seemed surprised, but not a whit disconcerted. His face did not change colour, nor did his hand tremble as he picked up the jewel to examine it more closely. "It is very beautiful," he replied, quietly. "What a pity that the opal brings misfortune upon its possessor, for this is a lovely stone."

"Do you believe in that superstition?"

"Not exactly; still I would not wear this jewel for anything in the world if it was presented to me. Look! this little charm I wear at the end of my watch-chain cost me ten louis a couple of weeks ago, and since I have had it in my possession, I have lost nearly a hundred times as much."

"My opal was not intended for a charm, or to be worn upon the finger, it is too large. But do you see nothing peculiar about it?"

"Nothing except its brilliancy. Wait a minute—yes, it was attached to some other stones; the links that united them have been broken recently. But of course you don't know how, as you found it."

"Yes, I do know."

"Then you must also know whom it belongs to."

"I thought I knew, but now I am compelled to admit that I was mistaken."

"What! you pretend to know the person who broke the necklace or bracelet which this jewel formed part of, but you don't know whom it belongs to?"

"Well, it was I who broke the links that connected it with the other jewels, unintentionally, of course. But, seriously, have you never seen this opal before?"

"Never."

"That's strange."

"But why? Do you take me for a jeweller?" inquired young Calprenède, laughing.

"No; but I fancied the necklace was yours."

"If it had belonged to me, I should have disposed of it long ago."

"Even if it had been bequeathed to you by your mother?"

"In that case, I should have arranged for it to revert to my sister. That is precisely what I did with the diamonds my mother left. I was ten years old when she died, and naturally these diamonds remained in the hands of my father, who had charge of my property. When I became of age, he gave me a formal account of his stewardship; an inventory was made, and by common consent we decided that Arlette should have the jewels. I had no use for them; Arlette, on the contrary, can wear them when she marries."

"That's true," said Doutrelaise, blushing. Any allusion to the marriage of Mademoiselle de la Calprenède always embarrassed him.

"But I am perfectly sure," continued Julien, "that my mother's jewel cases did not contain a single opal. Besides, no one wears a string of these jewels around their neck nowadays, and if they were ever in fashion, it was at some far distant period, or in some country like Japan or India. Look at this setting, and tell me if you think you could find anything like it in the establishment of a Parisian jeweller. It must have been wrought

by some skilled workmen of the far East, and may possibly have been stolen from the treasure house of the Mikado. I would wager a considerable amount that this necklace once formed part of a collection, if it did not belong to some museum. Perhaps I may now be allowed to ask when, and under what circumstances, you severed this jewel from the ornament of which it formed a part. I suppose it is no secret, as you willingly showed me your prize."

Doutrelaise, completely reassured as far as Julien was concerned, thought it advisable to conceal nothing from his companion. "I told you of my midnight adventure," he said, "and how I jostled against some one on the staircase. As I did so, I seized something he was holding in his hand. I pulled with all my might, and this opal remained in my grasp."

"This is extraordinary. But under such circumstances how could you for one moment suppose it was I prowling about in the dark with a valuable necklace in my hand? Did you think I had stolen it?"

"No, certainly not. Do you wish me to tell you the truth?"

"It is absolutely indispensable that I should know it."

"And you will not be offended?"

"You will offend me far more if you are silent."

"But it seems to me you are a trifle angry already; however, I presume we are too good friends for you to take offence at the confession I am going to make. I thought this necklace belonged to you or to some member of your family, and that, being in want of money, you had decided to try and pawn it."

"You evidently have a very poor opinion of me," said young Calprenède, straightening himself up, "and I am not at all pleased that you should consider me accountable for the extraordinary goings-on in the house we occupy."

"Extraordinary goings-on!" exclaimed a bantering voice. "It strikes me that you are slandering my house, sir."

Doutrelaise looked up quickly, and was astonished to see M. Matapan standing beside him. There was now quite a crowd in the restaurant; waiters were moving briskly to and fro, and, thanks to the confusion, M. Matapan had approached his tenants without attracting the attention of either of them. They were not thinking of him, and when his loud voice resounded in their ears, they were both startled, though they did not betray their surprise in the same manner. Young Calprenède rose suddenly, caught up his hat, pulled it down over his ears, and imperiously ordered the first waiter who passed to bring him his overcoat. Doutrelaise, more and more astonished, glanced first at Julien, who seemed so anxious to depart, and then at his landlord, whose appearance was so inopportune. "What, Julien, are you going?" he exclaimed.

"As you see," replied young Calprenède, drily.

"Wait a moment, my dear fellow, and I will accompany you. I have something for you."

"Never mind; I haven't time to wait," was the response. And Julien having obtained possession of his overcoat, turned on his heel and made for the door.

"I seem to be driving you away," sneered M. Matapan. "So much for being in the habit of serving notices; all my tenants fly at my approach."

But Julien was already nearly out of hearing, and deigned no reply when Doutrelaise called after him: "My dear fellow, I am at your service at any time, as you know. You will find me at home or at the club."

M. Matapan had witnessed this little scene with unruffled calmness, and it was easy to see by his smile that it had appeared exceedingly ridiculous to him. The millionaire was a stout man, who bore the weight of his fifty years with remarkable sprightliness. He stooped a trifle, it is true, but time had not silvered his locks, which were as black as jet, though the heavy beard that covered more than half of his face was beginning to turn grey. His eyes sparkled like live coals; and whenever he laughed his parted lips disclosed long, white, pointed, wolf-like teeth. He had a prominent forehead, and a long, hooked nose; and had he been small of stature, his appearance would have been grotesque; but he had the figure and bearing of a dragoon, and the thought of ridiculing him never occurred to any one. Moreover, his intelligent and expressive face was by no means displeasing, being naturally gay, and at times almost congenial.

Doutrelaise, who knew him well, could not help wondering what had brought him to the *Café de la Paix* at this hour. Not the intention of breakfasting, evidently, for he did not seem inclined to sit down, and Doutrelaise certainly felt no desire to detain him.

Suddenly, however, for some inexplicable reason, M. Matapan's manner changed. He placed his hand upon the back of the chair Julien de la Calprenède had just vacated, and began to tilt it to and fro, with the undecided air of a man who cannot quite make up his mind whether to go or stay. Just then Doutrelaise perceived the opal which he had laid upon the table while talking with Julien, and which he had forgotten to replace in his pocket. His first impulse was to conceal it by covering it with his napkin, but such an act might arouse the curiosity, and perhaps the suspicion, of this keen and observant millionaire, so he concluded that it would be best to call for his bill, and, while waiting for it, to chat with Matapan, and adroitly regain possession of the jewel.

However, the landlord now remarked: "I came here to meet some one. I don't see him, but I hope that he will make his appearance before long. Do you object to my taking the seat just vacated by Monsieur de la Calprenède?"

"Not at all," replied Albert, hypocritically.

"I won't bore you long, and I can offer you a very good cigar. Last year one of my friends in Havana sent me ten thousand cigars of this brand; there are none like them in Paris."

"Thanks, my dear baron," said Doutrelaise, holding out his hand for the fragrant weed. He intended to take advantage of this movement to secrete the opal, but he fancied his landlord was watching his movements, and so he dared not touch it.

"What excited the wrath of your young friend?" asked Matapan. "I indulged in an innocent jest on hearing his remark, and he darted off like a lunatic. But is he also angry with you? I fancied he answered you rather crustily."

"Oh, I don't mind that."

"And you are quite right. This last of the Calprenèdes is very childish. But, by the way, to what strange goings-on did he refer? I think a great deal of my house, and anything connected with it interests me deeply."

It occurred to Doutrelaise that it would perhaps be better to tell the plain truth. He was sure now that it was not Julien whom he had met on the staircase, so he had no fear of compromising him by relating the adventure of the previous night; besides, it might be as well to learn what the landlord thought of these nocturnal mysteries; and so he described the

incident of the night before without further scruples. The baron listened attentively until the story was concluded, and then said : "The person you met was probably some servant who was late in returning from a wine-shop, and who did not wish to be recognised—your own man, perhaps."

"I think not."

"I am sure it wasn't mine. He drinks nothing but water, and goes to bed as soon as I have no further need of him. By the way, where did you say you met the man?"

"On the second flight of stairs."

"Well, my rooms are on the first floor ; Monsieur de la Calprenède, who only employs female servants now, occupies the second ; on the third—But now I think of it, the servants use the backstairs exclusively."

"I am certain the person I met was not a servant."

"But what became of him?"

"He entered the apartment on the second floor."

"That's strange. In that case it must have been either the Count de la Calprenède or his son."

"I thought at first it was the son, but he just told me that he remained at the club until two o'clock."

"Was it because you were questioning him about his habits that he was so angry ?—for angry he certainly was."

"He was out of humour because he had been unlucky at play."

"Hum ! he can lose ; but as for paying, that is a different matter. Where could he get the money ?"

"That is no business of mine," replied Doutrelaise quickly.

"Nor mine," was the rejoinder.

Doutrelaise, while he talked, had succeeded in placing his napkin over the opal which still remained upon the table. His instinct warned him that it would be better for Matapan not to see it, not because he still entertained any suspicions of Julien's complicity, but because he had not decided to divulge everything, for a poor young man who plays heavily is always liable to suspicion, and he did not wish Mademoiselle de la Calprenède's brother to be even suspected.

Besides, M. Matapan had probably failed to notice the jewel, for he had not spoken of it, and he would probably have done so had he seen it. Albert, whose mind was now quite relieved, as he had only to slip the jewel into his pocket, thought it might be as well to ask the baron what he thought of the strange revelation which Julien had just made about the nocturnal intrusions into his apartment. "I think you are mistaken," he remarked. "It was not Julien I met last night."

"But who else would have been likely to enter Monsieur de la Calprenède's rooms ?"

"I don't know ; but he tells me that on several occasions he has noticed signs of the entrance of some mysterious visitor—furniture disarranged, for instance, particularly in his study."

"All that is absurd. You say nothing has been missed from the apartment. If you told me that any one entered the count's room to steal property, it would be very different. In that case, the thief would soon be captured, I promise you, for I would at once call in the detectives ; if need be, I would serve as a detective myself."

"But, whatever Julien may say to the contrary," retorted Doutrelaise, forgetting his earlier resolution, "I am satisfied that the man I met last night *had* committed a theft."

"What?" inquired M. Matapan, with an incredulous air. "I didn't think the count had many things of value in his possession. Oh, by the way, perhaps it was from him that the ornament was taken which you were showing his son when I came in."

"What ornament?" stammered Doutrelaise, blushing to his ears.

"The one you have there under your napkin."

Albert saw that nothing remained but to make a clean breast of the matter. "Ah, well! you have guessed the truth," he muttered, uncovering the opal. "I did not want to tell you this for fear of making you feel uncomfortable; but the person I met last night on your staircase was probably a thief. This jewel formed part of a necklace which he held in his hand; I wrested it from him in my struggle with him."

"Will you allow me to examine it more closely?" inquired the baron. He took up the opal and looked at it very carefully. His eyes sparkled, and his hands trembled slightly when he laid it down again, and it seemed to Doutrelaise that the expression of his face had changed. "Then you think this opal was stolen from Monsieur de la Calprenède?" asked Matapan.

"No, nor does his son think so."

"That matters little, after all. It has been stolen from some one, and I am very anxious to discover the thief. We are all interested in his detection, for he must live in the house. I don't ask you to confide this article to my keeping, but you will not refuse to take care of it until this mystery is cleared up."

"Certainly not."

"I think it won't be long before I discover the owner of the necklace, and after that, we will see. But it is one o'clock. The gentleman I was expecting has not made his appearance, and I must go." Doutrelaise accepted his landlord's proffered hand, but made no attempt to detain him. He was already secretly reproaching himself for having said too much, and had no desire to be inveigled into disclosing more.

III.

IN the household of the Count de la Calprenède, breakfast was no longer the cheerful repast that it had been in happier years when the countess had presided at the table opposite her husband, and between her son and daughter. She was dead, and most of the gaiety and happiness of the family seemed to have departed with her. Nevertheless, this meal was the pleasantest hour of the day. The father liked to meet his children at the breakfast-table, for he did not see them as often as he wished, as he had very little time to give them. Not that he held any public office, but the care of his fortune afforded him ample employment, for this fortune of his, once very considerable, had unfortunately been invested in industrial enterprises which had been in a precarious condition for several years.

M. de la Calprenède was born with two failings which marred all his good qualities. He had a passion for inventions, and the weakness to believe that nature had created him expressly for the management of great financial undertakings. An inventor had only to apply to him to secure the support of his influence and purse; and it was only necessary to refer to some bold project or hazardous speculation for him to offer to engage in it, or even assume the direction of it. And these projects and speculations

invariably failed. Still, repeated reverses had neither damped his ardour nor humbled his pride. He still walked with his head proudly erect, as he had a right to do, having never failed to preserve his honour unsullied ; and he faced the future without shame or fear, ready to submit to ruin with the same unruffled composure that he had displayed in prosperity, and feeling no dread that his children would ever reproach him for having merely bequeathed them an untarnished name.

His wife had been comparatively poor when he married her, so when Julien attained his majority, he had inherited but a small amount from his mother. Arlette was under twenty, so it was not yet time for her father to give her an account of his stewardship, which she certainly was not likely to demand, even when she became old enough to have a right to do so. She adored her father, who reciprocated her affection, and they were always together ; whereas Julien, who had been educated away from home, had early exhibited a love of independence, which did not harmonize with M. de la Calprenède's somewhat autocratic ideas.

The count had changed none of his habits, and, great as was his pecuniary embarrassment, his household was maintained, if not exactly upon the same footing, at least with the same decorum as in former years. It is true he held no more evening receptions, gave no more dinners, and no longer kept a carriage or valet ; but the service was always well ordered, and the establishment had an air of comfort, even though the count had moved one storey higher in order to lessen his expenses. M. and Madame Bourleroy endeavoured to console themselves for the air of superiority that pervaded their neighbour's establishment by telling their friends that the Calprenèdes' furniture was mortgaged, and that the silver was finding its way, piece by piece, to the pawnshop. But the count and his daughter paid no heed to these slanders. Unfortunately, they had other and graver troubles.

On that particular morning, M. de la Calprenède seemed even more gloomy than usual when he entered the dining-room. Arlette was very pale, and her tear-stained eyes betrayed the state of her feelings. "Have you been out this morning ?" the count inquired as he kissed her.

"Yes, father, I went to church," she replied. "I was about to enter your room to inform you of my intention of doing so, when I discovered that you were not alone."

"Monsieur Matapan honoured me with a visit. Did you meet him ?"

"No, father."

"Julien is not here, I see," remarked the count, frowning.

"I think he has gone to take a fencing lesson," replied the girl timidly.

"To set himself right, no doubt," added M. de la Calprenède, bitterly. "I heard him moving about all night, and I think he did not go to bed at all. But on the whole, I am rather glad he did not decide to breakfast with us this morning, for I wish to speak to you on an important matter. You may retire, Julia," he added, turning to the servant in attendance.

There was a moment of embarrassing silence. The count looked searchingly at Arlette, who averted her eyes. She was oppressed by a presentiment of approaching misfortune. "Do you know the object of Monsieur Matapan's visit ?" inquired her father, abruptly.

"No, father, but I presume he wished to see you on business."

"Business, yes. It was indeed a business transaction that he proposed. He asked for your hand in marriage." Arlette started violently. "The man's audacity exceeds all bounds, does it not ? The proposal he had the assurance to make to me is an insult. That is your opinion, I am sure of it."

"It is so strange that I cannot explain it," murmured Arlette.

"I can explain it very easily. He is rich, and I am not, and he fancies his millions will bridge the social gulf that separates us."

"He does not know you, father."

"And he knows you still less. You would not be a child of mine if you did not despise money."

Arlette was silent, but it was evident that she was deeply incensed, the more so because she was unable to give vent to her indignation. It seemed to her that M. Matapan had insulted her by presenting himself as a suitor for her hand. "You do not ask me what I said to him in reply," continued the count.

"I know it," she responded, "for I am sure we fully agree in this matter."

"I was sure of it also, and therefore I did not consult you. I told this newly fledged nobleman that my daughter was not born to bear the absurd name he must have picked up in some geography, and I did not take the trouble to soften my refusal. But he had the assurance to insist, and to remind me that he was a baron! I laughed in his face, and speedily put an end to the absurd discussion. He went off furious, I suspect, though he did not allow me to see it; and we are well rid of him. That I have made an irreconcileable enemy is equally certain, however."

"Fortunately, you have nothing to fear from him."

"No, not in one sense. He certainly won't dare to declare open war. My honour is above any attack of his, and I am not in his power, since I am not his debtor. Even the very slight intercourse I have been obliged to have with him will speedily end, for I have decided to leave this house."

"To leave this house?"

"Yes. Shall you regret to go?"

"Whatever you decide will be for the best, father. Only I am accustomed to the house, and there are so many associations connected with it—my poor mother died here."

"Yes; in the apartment below, which I was obliged to give up, and which that man now occupies," said the count gloomily. "It seems almost profanation, and I have often regretted that I did not purchase this house when I was able to do so. I should have been spared bitter sorrow, and I should also have saved a part of my fortune, and have something to bequeath to you."

"Poverty has no terrors for me," murmured the girl.

"Yes, I know that yours is a noble soul, and that you would bear poverty without repining, but I still hope you will be spared the ordeal. You have been compelled to endure too much already in being subjected to the overtures of this fellow Matapan. He would never have ventured to think of you, had he not been aware of my financial embarrassment."

"You have shown him that he did not know us."

"My only thought now is how to protect you from the insolent pretensions of others of his stamp, and I shall succeed. The present is gloomy, I admit; but I rely upon the future—an immediate future, which will not only restore everything, but more than we have lost."

"Ah, how fervently I pray Heaven to grant this for your and my brother's sake."

"Especially for his. May Heaven protect my poor boy, who seems to be on the verge of a frightful abyss. I have almost renounced all hope of bringing him back to the right path, and I live in constant fear of learning that he has brought disgrace upon his name."

"Oh, father, he may allow himself to be led into excesses, but he will certainly never tarnish the honour of his name."

"If he does, I will kill him. But he is leading a life of dissipation. In less than two years he has squandered all the property he inherited from his mother, and I don't know where he obtains the means of prolonging this disgraceful existence. What would you say if I told you that the idea that he borrowed money of Matapan has occurred to me?"

"No. I will never believe that."

"Nor do I now, for if such had been the case, Monsieur Matapan would have revealed the fact in revenge for the reception I gave him. But let us cease to discuss your scapegrace of a brother, and talk of yourself, my dear Arlette. I see only one way to protect you from other suitors of Monsieur Matapan's stamp, and that is to find a husband for you, my child : in short to marry you."

"Marry me ?" repeated the girl, deeply agitated.

"Oh, not to the millions of an adventurer or a *parvenu* like young Bourleroy ; but to a young, intelligent and well-bred man whom you can love and respect. Wealth isn't an essential by any means. I shall be satisfied if he can assure you independence. Wealth will come by-and-bye. I will promise to furnish that. This is my plan. What do you think of it?"

"I think—I have no desire to leave you, father," Arlette replied, not a little embarrassed.

"That is the usual response in such cases," exclaimed the count, gaily, "but I sha'n't be satisfied with it, I warn you. We must understand each other perfectly. Does my scheme impress you favourably, yes or no ?"

"Really, my dear father, I can't say until I have seen the person."

"I will soon show him to you, but in the meantime, I will describe him."

"What ! he exists—you have seen him !" exclaimed the young girl, turning visibly paler.

"Certainly. If I hadn't some one in view I shouldn't have spoken as I did. Now listen. He is thirty years old, and very prepossessing in appearance. His manners are perfect, and his mind and character are of a superior order. I don't know his exact income, but think it exceeds the amount I consider necessary. The only objection I have to him is that he is an idler, and that his conduct up to the present time has not been quite as exemplary as I could desire ; but you will soon bring him back to the paths of wisdom, and I will see that he is provided with a suitable occupation and one which will enrich us all. Can you guess now who it is ?"

"I haven't the slightest idea."

"I will help you a little. Do you know our pleasant neighbour, Monsieur Doutrelaise ?"

"Is it to him you desire to marry me ?" exclaimed Mademoiselle de la Calprenède, placing her hand upon her wildly throbbing heart.

"What !" cried the count, frowning. "Who spoke of such a thing as marrying you to that young man ? What can have put the absurd idea that I would consent to make my daughter a Madame Doutrelaise into your head ? Doutrelaise !" he repeated, scornfully ; "a fine name indeed ! You have never thought of such a thing as bearing it, I hope ?"

"No," murmured poor Arlette. "I only fancied—"

"You certainly could not fancy that I had any idea of marrying you to a man who is popular enough in our set, it is true, but who does not belong to it. And if you had allowed me to finish instead of interrupting me you would have already learned the name of the person I have in view. I had

a reason for speaking of Monsieur Doutrelaise. He knows the gentleman ; indeed, he is very intimate with him. They have been well-nigh inseparable for a year past. Do you recollect an evening when we attended a concert in the Champs-Elysées ?”

“ Perfectly,” replied Arlette, quickly.

“ We met our neighbour there. He was very polite—as he always is, for he is exceedingly well bred—and I was well pleased to have him take a seat beside us. You must recollect, too, that you had an animated conversation with him on the respective merits of Mozart and Glück.”

“ Monsieur Doutrelaise is an excellent musician, and, like myself, he is a great admirer of classical music.”

“ You seemed to agree marvellously ; but I was unable to follow you in your rhapsodies, and should have been terribly bored had I not found some one to talk to. But, fortunately for me, Monsieur Doutrelaise was not alone. And he introduced one of his friends to us.”

“ I have an indistinct recollection of his having done so.”

“ I am surprised that you don’t better remember the young man, for he is not one to be ignored by any means. He is remarkably distinguished in appearance, and I greatly enjoyed my conversation with him. But if his personal attractions didn’t impress you, his name must have done so, for it is one of the oldest among the Norman nobility.”

“ I don’t remember it.”

“ Then I will tell you. His name is Jacques de Courtaumer.”

“ Yes, I remember now,” stammered Arlette. “ He is a relative of Madame de Vervins, is he not ?”

“ Her nephew. It was at her house that I became acquainted with his worth. It was from her, too, that I gained my information about him, and the opinion of the marchioness has great weight with me. I would accept a son-in-law of her choosing with closed eyes.”

“ And has she told you that Monsieur de Courtaumer wishes to marry me ? Why, I don’t believe he has the slightest desire to marry—”

“ Ah ! it is plain that you have honoured him with more notice than you are willing to confess,” exclaimed the count, laughing.

“ No, father ; but—”

“ But his friend Doutrelaise has probably told you that he has sworn to remain a bachelor ; but that is one of those vows a man is not obliged to keep. Monsieur de Courtaumer served with honour in the navy for a dozen years. Not long ago he sent in his resignation, and his aunt admits he did it in order to come to Paris and enjoy himself. He has been doing this for eighteen months, but Madame de Vervins, who knows him well, declares that he is already growing weary of an aimless life, and that it would be easy for an attractive young girl to complete his conversion. She is of the opinion that you would suit him exactly.”

“ But that is not at all probable. He scarcely knows me. I don’t think he has ever even spoken to me.”

“ He is very reserved ; but he has spoken of you to the marchioness, and we know that he admires you very much. If you feel no aversion to meeting him, it will be an easy matter to give you an opportunity to become better acquainted with each other.”

“ I will do whatever you desire, father ; but—”

“ But it seems to me you are not anxious to see Monsieur de Courtaumer again.”

“ I have no desire to leave you,” said Arlette, lowering her eyes.

M. de la Calprenède made a slight movement of impatience.

" You answer as if you were still a child, though you have arrived at the age of discretion," he said, after a moment's silence. " Listen to me, my dear Arlette. The time has come for me to have a full explanation with you. You shall be perfectly free to refuse or accept the husband I choose for you. No one but yourself shall dispose of your hand ; I shall only interfere in case you make an improper choice, which will not happen. You know as well as I do that Mademoiselle de la Calprenède cannot marry a man who is not her equal in birth and education. Besides, my dear girl, I must inform you that I have made no overtures to Monsieur de Courtaumer. There has been nothing more than an exchange of opinions between his aunt and myself, and perhaps I should have deferred mentioning the subject to you, had not Monsieur Matapan's impertinent proposal reminded me that I may at any moment die, leaving you alone and penniless."

" Die ! you talk of dying !" exclaimed the girl, making a movement as if to fling herself in her father's arms.

He checked her with a gesture, and smilingly resumed : " I have no desire to do so, I assure you. I hope and expect to live to see you happy, as you well deserve to be, but it is my duty to prepare for any emergency. What would become of you if I were taken from you ? Julien's conduct is not of a character to indicate that he could be relied upon in case of misfortune or adversity. Oh ! don't attempt to defend him. I must wait for some proofs of discretion on his part before I can change my opinion. Under these circumstances, it is absolutely necessary that you should know the condition of my affairs. As I have told you, I am greatly embarrassed pecuniarily, and if I were obliged to-morrow to hand over to you the money bequeathed to you by your poor mother, I should not know where to procure it. A great part of my fortune has been swallowed up in disastrous speculations. However, the rest is invested in an enterprise which will more than repay our losses if it is successful, but which absorbs all my resources at the present moment. It is necessary for us to economise, as you are well aware. I have moved in order to pay a smaller rent ; I entertain no more company, and I no longer take you into society. You have borne the change very bravely, but it is none the less deplorable, and I won't conceal the fact that the husband I have chosen for you can hasten the consummation of my plans."

" What ! Monsieur de Courtaumer—"

" Monsieur de Courtaumer is an experienced sailor, and is consequently possessed of knowledge which would be of great benefit to me in the undertaking upon which your future and mine depend. I have never told you how I have invested the remnants of my fortune, I believe, but it is time for you to know. I have purchased the cargo of a sunken vessel."

Arlette gazed at M. de la Calprenède in utter astonishment. She had but little knowledge of speculations of any kind, and this seemed to her so strange that she wondered if her father was really in earnest.

" This vessel," continued the count, " was laden with a large amount of gold : and the entire cargo now belongs to me—the only difficulty is to wrest it from the keeping of the sea, which is now guarding it. This is what I am about to attempt ; and, if I succeed, you will be rich—much richer even than the millionaire Matapan. Do you understand now why I desire Monsieur de Courtaumer's assistance ? "

" Not very well, I admit," murmured Arlette, sadly.

" What ! " exclaimed the count : " don't you understand that if Monsieur

de Courtaumer, who has been to sea for a dozen years, and who is familiar with the coast upon which this vessel was wrecked, will interest himself in my undertaking, and conduct it himself, we shall be certain of success?"

"Perhaps so; but—"

"You doubt his willingness. I don't. This young man is already tired of his idle life here in Paris, and he is just at the age to long for daring adventures. This will be full of charm for him, I am sure. Now I have confided my secret to you—for it is a secret—and I beg that you will guard it carefully. I don't wish your brother to know that I have piles of gold anywhere, and I have also explained the reasons that make me desire a marriage between you and Monsieur de Courtaumer."

This time Arlette summoned courage to say what she really thought. "Father," she began, in a firm voice, "it seems to me that Monsieur de Courtaumer might engage in this undertaking without marrying me. I must admit that I don't clearly perceive the connection between my marriage and—"

"And submarine explorations. Certainly these projects are quite independent of each other, and in offering the young man an interest in the enterprise, I shall not make his asking your hand in marriage a condition—"

"No, for that would seem too much like a business transaction," said the girl gently, "and you were indignant just now that Monsieur Matapan should venture to offer you his millions in exchange for—"

"But this is quite a different thing," interrupted M. de la Calprenède. "Matapan is no match for you, while Courtaumer—But I repeat that there is to be no compulsion whatever. Have no fears, my dear child; I shall not force you upon any one's acceptance, and I will only marry you to a man who will appreciate and eagerly crave the honour of espousing you."

"That is certainly not the case with Monsieur de Courtaumer."

"How do you know? He has told Madame de Vervins that he thinks you charming. That is quite enough for the present. You young girls have such mistaken ideas of life. You fancy that love comes upon one like a thunder-clap. But these explosions occur only in romance."

"But did you not just tell me that I am poor. Modest as Monsieur de Courtaumer's fortune may be—"

"It is nevertheless superior to yours? That is true; so an immediate marriage is entirely out of the question. For the present I merely mean to ask Monsieur de Courtaumer if he would like to become my partner in this great enterprise. If he accepts, as I hope he will, he will be obliged to leave Paris. My vessel is not at the bottom of the Seine, neither is it at the end of the world. It will take a long time to conclude the work, as I shall only employ a small number of workmen, for I desire to avoid publicity as much as possible. While the work is in progress, I shall necessarily be brought into frequent contact with Monsieur de Courtaumer. He will call here often, and I shall pay frequent visits to the scene of his labours. You can accompany me if you like, so opportunities for meeting and becoming intimately acquainted with the young man will not be wanting. If he doesn't please you after you have had a chance to study his character, nothing more shall be said on the subject; the matter will go no further; and if the enterprise fails, it will also be necessary to abandon this project, for my last hope will have fled, and you will be too poor to aspire to a rich husband. But on the contrary, if we should be successful, you will have as much money as my partner; at least, the difference in your fortunes

will be so slight that you can become the wife of Monsieur de Courtaumer, without any danger of being accused of marrying him for his millions."

Arlette breathed freely once more. The danger was not imminent ; she had plenty of time to avert it. A marriage dependent upon so many improbable events was scarcely more than a castle in the air, so she thought it was useless to annoy M. de la Calprenède by refusing in advance a consent which she would probably never be called upon to give.

"I will comply with your wishes," she replied, gently. "I think I shall incur no risk of forging any lasting fetters for myself by doing so," she added, rather mischievously.

"We shall see : but there is no need of any further discussion. I had no desire to take an unfair advantage of you ; but now, you know my wishes. Perhaps I was unwise not to conceal my intentions. If I had not spoken to you about this young man, you would have found him charming ; now, I shouldn't be surprised if you take a dislike to him merely because I have praised him."

"You must have a very poor opinion of me," said Arlette, smiling.

"By no means ; but you wouldn't be a woman if you were not endowed with some spirit of contradiction. I ought to have spoken disparagingly of this suitor ; it would certainly have been the surest way to induce you to accept him. But I have praised him, and now it will be his task to overcome your prejudices ; and I believe he will succeed."

"Why not, since I am by no means hard to please. Shall I give you another cup of tea, father?"

"If you please. The lecture I have just delivered has cooled what I have here. You know I am rather a novice in the business—I have never preached except to your scapegrace brother—and I see him so rarely. But what is it, Julia ? I did not ring."

"Monsieur Matapan asks if the count will do him the honour to receive him," replied the servant, who had just entered without being summoned.

"Again ? Really this is too much," muttered the count. Then he added aloud : "You told him that I was engaged, I suppose ?"

"I told him that you were at breakfast, sir ; but Monsieur Matapan replied that he had come to make an important communication, and that he would wait until you had finished your repast."

"Very well," answered M. de la Calprenède impatiently. "Show him into my private room."

When he was once more alone with his daughter, who was greatly troubled by this announcement of the baron's return, the count, springing angrily from his chair, exclaimed : "I must put an end to this fellow's intrusions. As he won't acknowledge his defeat, I shall receive him in such a way that he won't feel inclined to renew his overtures. But I don't understand how he dares to return to the charge after the repulse he received."

"But what if he has come to say something about—about my brother ?" murmured the girl.

"About Julien ?" exclaimed M. de la Calprenède. "What can have put such an idea into your head ? What can he have to say to me about your brother ?"

"But, father, you yourself only a few minutes ago—"

"Go on. Finish what you have to say."

"You were wondering if Julien had not perhaps borrowed—"

"Borrowed money of this man! If he has done that, I will never see him again. I can forgive him anything save such a want of self-respect. But no; if Monsieur Matapan was his creditor, he would not have missed the opportunity of telling me so when I dismissed him. He would have taunted me with Julien's disgrace without any scruples whatever. However, I will go and see him. Remain here, my dear Arlette, and do not worry. The day has opened propitiously, since you agree to my plans concerning your future; and it will end equally well. In a few minutes I will return and tell you what this barbarian wants with me."

Arlette made no attempt to detain her father, although she did not regard this second visit as a favourable omen by any means, and M. de la Calprenède went to meet the enemy.

The study in which his visitor was awaiting him was the room which separated Julien's bed-chamber from the count. The latter found M. Matapan standing there, hat in hand, cold but polite in manner, and evincing no embarrassment whatever. The count scarcely returned his bow, and did not even ask him to be seated. "I thought I made my meaning sufficiently clear this morning," he said drily. "What more can you have to say to me, sir?"

"Nothing concerning the subject of our previous conversation," responded M. Matapan, to all appearances perfectly unruffled by this more than disdainful reception. "I made a very simple request; you replied by a perfectly explicit refusal. The question is settled."

"Then what is the object of your present visit?"

"I came in search of some information which you will, perhaps, be able to give me respecting a matter which concerns you as well as every other inmate of the house, and which affects me even more deeply. I ought to warn you that I am obliged to begin with a sort of examination."

"To which I will see if it suits me to reply. Go on."

"In the first place, I should like to know if it is true that you have sent away your valet?"

"What difference can it make to you if I have? Are you ridiculing me?" cried the count, furiously angry.

"Far from it, sir; and I entreat you to believe that I have serious reasons for asking you this question. Something occurred last night which I should be very glad to impute to one of your servants only."

"I merely have female servants in my employ at present."

"So I was informed. But perhaps the valet you dismissed abstracted the key of your apartment when he went away?"

"No, he certainly did not."

"Can he have kept the key of mine, or rather of the apartment which you formerly occupied?"

"No, a thousand times no! What would you have me understand from all this?"

"That some one entered your apartments last night. I do not know who, but I am anxious to ascertain."

"Why? Do you fancy you have any right to interfere with the movements of such visitors as I choose to receive?"

"No; but I have a right to know what is going on in my own home, and some man, who he was I am unable to say, entered my rooms while I was asleep last night."

"That is no affair of mine."

"He opened the door; so he must have a key."

"Probably ; but I am not to blame for that."

"He must have had a key to your apartment also, for on leaving mine he entered yours."

"And you think it was my former valet who—"

"I am by no means certain of that. I am only endeavouring to solve the mystery."

"Seek the solution elsewhere, if you please. I am not inclined to act the part of a detective. Besides, this story is absurd."

"But it is nevertheless true. The man was met on the staircase by a person who did not recognise him for the hall was not lighted ; still this person is sure that he entered your apartment. He was heard opening and closing your door."

"Who heard him ?"

"Monsieur Doutrelaise."

"Why does he meddle with my affairs ? I didn't go out last evening, but my son is in the habit of coming in late. It was he, no doubt, returning."

"I cannot, and will not, believe that."

"Why, pray ?" inquired the count, becoming more and more irritated.

"Because, as I have already had the honour of telling you, the man who entered your apartment, first entered mine."

"I am really very much obliged to you for not accusing my son of such an act."

"I am the less inclined to do so as I was robbed."

"Ah ! so this is the meaning of this examination ? Do you venture to assert that I harboured a thief ?"

"By no means. On the contrary, I am certain that you are ignorant of the fact that he took refuge in your apartment. But it is none the less certain that he did take refuge there. Monsieur Doutrelaise is ready to swear to it."

"Let him swear to it, that makes no difference whatever to me. You are perfectly free to place any construction you like upon the affair ; but you certainly don't expect me to assist you in an investigation in which I have no interest whatever."

"No, sir ; certainly not. I shall act alone, if it becomes necessary to act. A necklace which I value very highly, both on account of its value, and also because it is an heirloom, was stolen from me last night."

M. de la Calprenède smiled disdainfully. He had not much faith in the baron's ancestral pretensions.

"The thief must have known where the necklace was, for he opened the drawer in which I locked it up last night before going to bed, and he touched no other article. He must also have been well acquainted with my apartment, for he went straight to the room in which I keep my valuables—the room corresponding with the one in which we are at this moment. He made no noise, and probably did not use a light, as he did not wake me. Moreover, my servant heard no sound."

"And so you conclude that a member of my household must be the culprit. I have no answer to give to all this. Make a complaint, if you deem it advisable to do so. I have nothing more to say on the subject, and it is now time to close this conversation."

A pause followed. The count was waiting for M. Matapan to withdraw, and M. Matapan showed no inclination to do so. He seemed to be absorbed in thought, and it was easy to see that he had more to say on the subject.

"So you advise me to complain to the authorities," he said slowly. "Have you reflected on the consequences of such a step? They would be deplorable, certainly not for me, but for some one—who is not a stranger to you."

"In the first place, I have given you no advice whatever," was the count's quick reply. "It is nothing to me whether you decide to make a complaint to the authorities or not. The matter concerns yourself alone. Let us end this conversation."

"I understand perfectly well, sir," rejoined the baron with unruffled composure, "that you are politely turning me out of doors, and under other circumstances I should not give you an opportunity to repeat this dismissal. I should even reply to it in a manner that would render any further intercourse between us an impossibility, for I am not of a patient disposition, and I am not in the habit of tamely submitting to insult."

"Nor do I allow any one to speak to me in the tone you just now used, so I repeat that we had better put an immediate end to this conversation."

"Not until you have heard all I have to say. I just had the honour of telling you that if I decided to make a formal complaint, it might cause you some annoyance to say the least, and I will now explain matters more clearly, solely on your account, allow me to remark. You must understand the real situation of affairs, and that is the only reason why I insist upon prolonging this conversation, in spite of your insulting manner and language."

"Well go on, I am listening, but be as brief as possible."

"As I have just told you, I have been robbed of a valuable necklace, and no one will doubt the assertion, for all my friends have seen the necklace in my possession. Last night it disappeared, and the magistrate to whom I shall report the theft will certainly not refuse to ferret out the perpetrator. He will of course subject me to an examination, and will ask me what I think of the moral character of the different inmates of the house. He will probably ask me if I suspect any one."

"Will you dare to tell him that you regard any member of my household with suspicion?"

"No, I shall take the greatest possible care not to let him know what I think of the affair. In an emergency like this, the strictest reserve is a duty."

"And what do you think?" exclaimed M. de la Calprenède, half frantic with passion.

"You will allow me to keep my opinion to myself," was the imperturbable baron's response. "But on going to the magistrate with my complaint, he will ask me to relate the circumstances attending the theft, and I shall be obliged to give him all the information in my power: I should not be justified in concealing anything from him. It will be necessary for me to tell him, for instance, that the man who took my necklace entered your apartment."

"You will also be obliged to prove that, and I defy you to do so, for I don't believe a word of that ridiculous story."

"Monsieur Doutrelaise will be summoned as a witness, and his testimony will be conclusive."

"Conclusive in what respect? He heard my door opened by someone, whom he had met on the stairs. That is no proof. And I again declare that this story is absurd."

"The magistrate won't think so when Monsieur Doutrelaise tells him that the man who had a key to your apartment had the stolen necklace in

his hands; and if the magistrate should still be inclined to doubt this statement Monsieur Doutrelaise can show him one of the jewels belonging to the necklace, an opal which he severed from the others while he was struggling with the thief on the stairs."

"Have you seen this jewel?"

"I did see it an hour ago on a table in a restaurant, where Monsieur Doutrelaise was breakfasting with one of his friends. I recognised it instantly, for the setting was very peculiar, being of Eastern workmanship, utterly unlike ours. The friend to whom Monsieur Doutrelaise had been showing it went away, and Monsieur Doutrelaise, on being left alone with me, related his midnight adventure. I did not tell him that the jewel belonged to me, but confined myself to asking him to retain possession of it, which he promised to do. Then I hastened home, and satisfied myself beyond a doubt of the strange disappearance of my necklace. When I first called on you this morning I was ignorant of the theft, and the strange facts connected with it; and when I did discover it, I felt that I ought not to act without warning you."

These words were uttered in a cold and dignified manner, which could not fail to impress M. de la Calprenède. "I certainly appreciate the motive that brought you here," he said after a short interval of reflection, "but I do not yet clearly understand the object of your visit. You wish to discover the thief, that is only natural, and I hope you will speedily regain possession of your jewels. But the complaint you think of making will result, so far as I and my household are concerned, in what? In the examination of my servants, my children, and possibly myself. It is never an agreeable task to give one's testimony in such matters, but it is a duty from which nothing should be allowed to deter one. I shall submit to it, of course."

"Then you can quietly contemplate all the probable results of my complaint, such, for instance, as having your apartments searched by a commissary of police?"

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Why, it is evident that the investigation will begin with a search, and as the thief entered this apartment, it is not unlikely that he concealed the necklace here, and if by any chance he also should be discovered—"

"He will not be found here, as you know perfectly well; for even admitting that my former valet robbed you and afterwards entered my room—which does not seem to me at all probable—he would not have left the necklace here. If he stole it, he did so with the intention of selling it, not of keeping it. He would have got rid of it as soon as possible. Besides, no one will think it at all likely that a servant who had been dismissed a month before, would return at night time to the house of the master who had dismissed him, to deposit the fruits of a robbery there, especially after what Monsieur Doutrelaise says occurred upon the staircase. The idea is absurd, as you yourself must admit."

"I quite agree with you, sir, upon this point, and it is probable that no one will think of accusing your former valet."

"Whom will they accuse, then?" asked the count, fixing his eyes searchingly on M. Matapan.

That gentleman made no response, but averted his eyes.

"Speak," cried M. de la Calprenède, angrily. "Be courageous enough to explain your meaning. Is it my daughter's maid who will be accused?"

"No ; for the theft was committed by a man."

"By me or my son, then ?"

"You, sir, are above such a suspicion."

"But my son is not. Is that what you mean to insinuate ?"

Again there was a pause. The count waited, greatly excited, and M. Matapan at last rejoined. "Magistrates nowadays always begin by inquiring into the lives led by the persons more or less directly implicated in an affair of this kind ; and to be regarded with suspicion, it is only necessary to gamble and be in debt."

"And my son is in debt, and my son gambles," said the count, quickly. "If he is under any pecuniary obligations to you, I—"

"Whether he owes me money, or not, matters little. Everyone knows that he is in debt, and that his expenses greatly exceed his income."

"That is no reason why he should be accused of a crime, and if anyone ventures to accuse him, he will clear himself, I have no fears of it. Go and enter your complaint. This case must be cleared up, and I don't fear an investigation."

"Very well, sir ; I sincerely hope you will have no cause to regret the decision you have just announced. On coming here, I hoped, I confess, that you would understand me better, and that we might avoid a scandal which it is very painful to me to provoke ; and you must allow me to say to you, before taking leave, that I should not have called in the assistance of the authorities if you had received the request I made to you this morning in a different manner."

"Ah !" exclaimed the count, white with passion, "so that was your object in coming. I might have known that you could have only returned to propose some disgraceful transaction. You hoped to intimidate me by some story you have probably invented, and you imagined that I would give you my daughter for the sake of avoiding an examination before a magistrate. You don't know me, sir. I laugh at your ridiculous threats, but even if they were serious my resolution would undergo no change. I would rather see my son go before the Assizes than have my daughter bear your name."

"My name is as good as any other," replied M. Matapan, coldly. "It is the name of an honest man. You objected to me as a son-in-law, as you had a perfect right to do ; but I no longer aspire to the honour of entering your family, so I did not come to make a bargain with you, but merely to learn if you desired to avoid a danger of which I felt it my duty to warn you. I should have liked nothing better than to hush up this unfortunate affair, and I hoped you would consent to question your son in my presence. If he is innocent, he could very easily clear himself ; and if he is guilty, he might make restitution. But you have refused to listen to reason, and instead of being grateful to me for my good intentions, you have treated me in a manner that leaves no alternative. I can do nothing now but make a complaint."

"Do so," replied the count, pointing to the door, whereupon the baron bowed and departed.

His last words were : "If any misfortune should befall you, remember, sir, that I did my best to avert it, but you would not listen to me."

M. de la Calprenède designed no reply to this Parthian shaft. He did not believe for a moment that Julien was a thief, and he apprehended no more danger for his son than for himself. Moreover, he scarcely believed that the baron had any intention of implicating them in a criminal affair,

for he suspected that M. Matapan had invented, or at least greatly exaggerated, the strange story he had related. But for all that, he secretly cursed the misguided youth, whose excesses had furnished the foundation for such an accusation, and in his anger he asked himself if it was not time for him to cast off the son who was compromising him by such inexcusable conduct. "I will defend him against this man's calumnies," he muttered, as he paced the floor with long quick strides, "but if he refuses to reform, I will compel him to leave Paris. If I don't interfere, he will end by disgracing me, and his dishonour will rebound upon my daughter and myself."

M. de la Calprenède did not ask himself if Julien was alone to blame for his misconduct; if he himself had done all that a sensible father should do for his child; if he had warned him of the dangers of idleness, and given him correct ideas in regard to the value of money, instead of allowing him to squander, unhindered, the little property he had inherited from his mother. He did not realise that he had transmitted his own faults to his son; that a passion for gambling is hereditary, and that the sin of fishing for gold buried in the sea is as heinous as indulgence in *baccarat*.

Just as the count was sternly declaring that he would bring his son's excesses to a speedy termination, the door gently opened and Arlette appeared. "You here?" her father said, frowning. "I asked you to wait for me."

"Yes, I know," replied Arlette, "but your interview with Monsieur Matapan lasted so long that I became anxious—"

"You were right," said the count, interrupting her. "He did come to see me about your brother."

"Good heavens! has Julien indeed been so foolish as to borrow money from that man?"

"Worse than that. Matapan says he has robbed him."

"Impossible!" exclaimed the girl.

"The wretch declares that such is the case."

"Then he lies. You did not believe him, you could not. Upon what does he found his accusation? What has happened?"

"Some one entered his room and stole an opal necklace. Last night Monsieur Doutrelaise, the neighbour whom you so highly appreciate, met a man on the staircase, in the dark, a man who afterwards entered our apartment, and who had the famous necklace in his hand. One opal was separated from the others in a kind of struggle between him and Monsieur Doutrelaise, and is now in the possession of the latter, who must be on excellent terms with our landlord, as he has made him his confidant."

"And he pretends it was my brother who—"

"He did not go quite so far as that. Matapan only ventured to insinuate that such was the case."

"Such a suspicion is abominable, and I am sure Monsieur Doutrelaise does not share it. I am sure, too, that if it were necessary, he would defend Julien, who is his friend."

"I know nothing about that, but Monsieur Matapan is going to afford him an opportunity, for he has gone to inform the commissary of police of the robbery, and repeat to him all I have just told you. He also informed me that we might expect a visit from the commissary, who will examine us all, beginning with your brother. What do you think of that?"

"That the absurdity of Monsieur Matapan's suspicions will be speedily shown."

"That is my opinion; and as the scoundrel had the audacity to insinuate that he would not enter a complaint if I would consent to give him your hand in marriage, I showed him the door."

"What! he dared—"

"Yes, but we shall have no further trouble. We are rid of him, and I await the threatened perquisition without the slightest disquietude."

"Perquisition?" repeated Arlette, who was not very familiar with legal terms.

"That is to say, the police will come here and rummage through all our drawers to see if they can find Monsieur Matapan's heirloom."

"And you will allow that?"

"I shall be obliged to do so. If I offer any opposition, I shall appear in a very unfavourable light. Yes, my dear child, the result of Monsieur Matapan's spite and our neighbour's gossip, will be that the police will open your desk and mine, and even pick the locks if need be. They have often forced stronger doors than these," added the count, playing with the key in the lock of a small but richly ornamented cabinet near the window.

The gilded key turned as he carelessly moved it to and fro, and the lid fell by reason of its own weight, revealing the interior of the cabinet. There flashing in the wintry sunlight, M. de la Calprenède beheld, in consternation, a number of jewels which he certainly had not placed there. He took them up. It was the opal necklace, the stolen necklace, for one opal was missing from the circlet. Arlette uttered a cry and fell fainting in the arms of the count, who threw the accursed jewels from him. "Julien—it was he! The guilty wretch shall be punished as he deserves! I will kill him!" the unhappy father hissed through his set teeth.

IV.

JACQUES DE COURTAUMER was a careless, light-hearted fellow who had wasted a good deal of his life, but who regretted neither his lost time nor his squandered fortune. After devoting himself passionately to his chosen profession for several years, he one fine morning came to the conclusion that the career of a naval officer was not so satisfactory after all, and that he might do better for himself than devote twenty-five or thirty years to the acquisition of a captain's epaulets. Unfortunately he had, like Albert Doutrelaise, been an orphan from his infancy, and was perfectly independent, having no relatives but an aunt and elder brother. They both had taken a deep interest in him from his birth, but he rarely consulted them, although he lived on the best possible terms with them. Since leaving the service he had led such an extravagant life that his fortune was already greatly reduced, an income of twenty thousand francs having dwindled down to thirteen. In fact, it seemed likely to dwindle down to nothing.

He thought of this prospect without the slightest perturbation, averring that philosophy is an unfailing consoler, and that he would have no difficulty whatever in acquiring wealth when his present resources were exhausted. Doutrelaise, who had been his chum at college and who had remained his faithful friend, had done his best to convince him of the danger of this reasoning, but Courtaumer would not listen, but rushed gaily onward to inevitable ruin. Whenever he received a severe lesson at the gaming-table or elsewhere—he paused for a few days, took time to digest his loss, as he

said ; but these pauses were never of long duration and he speedily launched out afresh into all sorts of folly.

On the day the young fellow wrote to Doutrelaise, however, he found himself in a position which obliged him to abandon his expensive pleasures for a time, although he had sufficient money on hand to pay what he owed. In the first moment of excitement following upon an unfortunate evening at cards, he had written to Doutrelaise, asking him for supplies, but after a good sleep it occurred to him that his friend was perhaps not in funds, that he might have to put himself to some inconvenience to assist him, and that it was therefore not advisable to make this call upon his purse.

Having come to this resolution Courtaumer went out for a walk, instead of waiting for Albert, whom he had asked to call between one and two. Jacques resided in a handsome house in the Rue de Castiglione, the property of his aunt, the Marchioness de Vervins. His apartments were not remarkable in any respect. The ceilings were low, the rooms very small, and the windows overlooked a rather gloomy courtyard ; but they had one very appreciable advantage to a fashionable young man who was not a millionaire. Madame de Vervins charged him no rent : in fact, had it been necessary, she would even have paid him to remain there, so proud and happy was she to be of any service to her favourite nephew. She had another one, Jacques's elder brother, who had married a rich wife and who was the father of a family, as well as a magistrate ; but Jacques had always been her Benjamin. She liked his disposition, and excused his follies, while her nephew the magistrate inspired her with esteem rather than love. Jacques got on wonderfully well with her. He neglected her shamefully whenever he had any money, but she forgave his slights, and killed the fatted calf as soon as reverses at the card-table sent him back for a time to her table and drawing-room.

The young scamp knew his aunt's weakness, and though we must do him the justice to say that he did not abuse it by endeavouring to extort money from her, he nevertheless took a mischievous delight in informing her of his losses, and telling her that he intended to quarter himself upon her until fortune again smiled upon him. On that particular day, Jacques concluded that it was time to pay her a visit, and so after again writing to Doutrelaise, telling him not to inconvenience himself in the least, he repaired to his aunt's apartments. The servants had standing orders to admit him at all hours, and he found his aunt having her hair put up in curl-papers by a maid who was almost as old as her mistress.

Madame de Vervins was the widow of a nobleman who had served under Charles X., but to see and hear her, no one would have thought her sixty years of age, although in reality she was over seventy. She was gay and sprightly, like all ladies of the old *régime*, extremely talkative, like grandmothers in general, independent in character, but at the same time every inch a lady. "So here you are, you owl !" she exclaimed as soon as Jacques showed himself. "It is a bad sign when you appear in the morning. How much have you lost !"

"Enough to make it necessary for you to invite me to dinner until New Year's-day."

"A large amount, then, that's evident. So much the better. I shall have your company the longer. But I have half a mind to starve you for a month to punish you. Eggs, vegetables, cream-cheese, with claret and water, would be a most wholesome diet for you. What do you think of it?"

"I think the only thing that could console me for such meagre fare would be the pleasure of having you opposite me at the table."

"Well, you won't have that pleasure this evening. I am going to dine at your brother's, and I don't suppose you feel any inclination to be present at the family gathering."

"No, his wife would scowl at me if I ventured to arrive late, and she would not fail to lecture me during dessert. She has a weakness for sermonising."

"I will allow you to escape her remonstrances this evening, but I don't intend that you shall escape mine. I shall return here to tea at nine o'clock. I expect a gentleman friend, and I trust you will see that we are not left *tête-à-tête*."

"Do you think that would be dangerous?" inquired Jacques, laughing.

"You are an impertinent fellow. When a young man has a rich aunt, he ought to conciliate her; and twitting her about her age is no way to win her favour."

"Really, aunt, I assure you that you didn't understand me. You are still young. It is your friend that I suspect of being old."

"Old or not, he has the poor taste to like your company, and he shall have it as a reward for coming to see me. You must spend the evening here. I will allow you to smoke, and you won't be bored, for my friend is a very agreeable gentleman. In fact you know him. He is the Count de la Calprenède. You must have already met him here, and you must know his son, who leads, I hear, a very dissipated life."

"I know him slightly, but not much better than the father, and I have never spoken to him half a dozen times."

"But I think you have seen the daughter?"

"Yes, aunt, and she is charming, as my friend Doutrelaise also thinks."

"Who's Doutrelaise?"

"Don't you remember him? I introduced him to you on my arrival in Paris, and you have never given a ball without inviting him."

"Ah, yes, I recollect now. A fair-haired young man, with very agreeable manners. But this isn't the question. Come, will you marry my friend's charming daughter?"

"I marry her!" exclaimed Jacques. Do you really wish me to marry Mademoiselle de la Calprenède?"

"I do not say that," replied Madame de Vervins; "I only ask if you will marry her. I have no desire to assert my authority in the matter."

"It is my opinion, aunt, that matrimony was not intended for me, and that I was not intended for matrimony."

"You will change your mind when you have spent your last penny."

"It will then be too late."

"Not at all, for I shall leave you my property; but as I shall live to be very old, and as you will run through the remainder of your fortune in three years at the furthest, I should like to know what you will do while you are waiting for your inheritance."

"I will turn a sailor again."

"But that's impossible, as you have resigned."

"I'll find a position on board some merchant vessel."

"A fine idea, truly! Think of a Courtaumer devoting his attention to cod and herring fishery!"

"I shouldn't be the first one. Didn't we have an ancestor who bought back the family estates with the money he had made in the spice-trade?"

"That was under Francis I. Besides, he discovered I know not how many islands."

"I will discover others."

"If that's your ambition I am very glad. The count has something of a similar nature to propose to you."

"What! is your noble friend interested in the progress of geographical science? I thought he devoted himself exclusively to the management of his fortune. People even say that he has managed it so cleverly as to lose the greater part of it."

"Hush, you are a slanderer. I declare that if Mademoiselle de la Calprenède accepts you for a husband, I sha'n't even pity you."

"I should pity her, aunt. Do I look like a man who is likely to make his wife happy? I am so fond of you, that I am really capable of allowing myself to be guided by your wishes in this matter, so I will run away."

"I won't detain you now, but if you fail to come this evening, I shall disinherit you."

This threat did not alarm Jacques; but he kissed his aunt on both cheeks and ran away like a school-boy who sees a scolding coming.

On reaching the street, he discovered that he was hungry, and as the Champs-Elysées were not far off he decided to go to one of the restaurants there. On entering the establishment he found it full of people, and even perceived some well-known faces—those of persons whom one meets everywhere, and to whom one finally falls into a habit of bowing. In one corner, moreover, there were four young fellows belonging to Courtaumer's club, including Anatole Bourleroy, whom he did not like, and whom he always avoided, although he met him at the gaming table almost every evening. He exchanged a rather reserved bow with these gentlemen, took a seat at a table some distance off, in order that he might not be obliged to join in their conversation, and then proceeded to regale himself with some *pâté de foie gras* and a bottle of chablis. This interesting occupation did not prevent him, however, from observing his neighbours, though he gave little or no attention to young Bourleroy's party. The graceful Anatole bore a striking resemblance to a figure in a tailor's fashion-plate, and the parting of his carefully frizzed hair, which was exactly in the middle, greatly irritated Courtaumer, whose hair curled naturally, though he wore it closely clipped. "That parting is as broad as a garden-path," Jacques said to himself. "One might take a promenade there. And to think that Doutrelaise was advising me to marry Bourleroy's sister only last evening! I would rather do anything than that." This reflection reminded him of his aunt's advice, and he smiled to think that poor Albert little suspected that his best friend was being urged to supplant him in Arlette's favour. "He has nothing to fear," thought Jacques. "I sha'n't do it, and this evening I shall, perhaps, find an opportunity to say a good word for him while I'm talking with his lady-love's father."

But Jacques' thoughts were speedily turned into a different channel, for at the end of the room, directly opposite him, he saw a person who attracted his attention. This person was a man of middle age, not very tall, but strongly and compactly built. His thin face was smoothly shaven, and his tawny skin betrayed his southern origin in an unmistakable manner. Moreover his garments had certainly been made in a land where French fashions penetrated only after a lapse of ten years or more, and he wore several heavy rings and a watch chain as thick as a cable. In addition, he used his knife in conveying his food to his mouth. "He looks like a South American,"

thought Courtaumer, "and the strangest thing about it all is that I fancy I have seen him somewhere before."

The stranger was eating noisily and voraciously ; but in spite of this, he seemed to be returning the ex-lieutenant's scrutiny, and their eyes often met. "He appears to take an interest in me," muttered Jacques, "and why, I should like to know? Perhaps he recognises me. I can't rid myself of the idea that we have met somewhere previously, though I don't know where. Not in a drawing-room surely."

At this moment the stranger, having consumed all the bread that had been placed before him, rose to obtain a fresh supply from a neighbouring table. "I know now," thought Courtaumer. "He's a sailor; there is no mistaking that walk. It would not be at all surprising if I had met him in some port or other. Is he a Frenchman? I can't tell; but he certainly is not an officer, though I have met some who were really no better bred. If he's a common sailor, he must be a whaler just returned from a lucky cruise, for he doesn't appear to mind expense. He is treating himself to a high-priced breakfast, and he sports a diamond upon each little finger."

After vainly striving to solve the mystery for some little time, Jacques finally came to the conclusion that he should not succeed, and being only moderately interested he renounced the attempt. The stranger, on his side, after watching Jacques rather persistently for awhile, ceased to pay any further attention to him, and devoted himself to the task of emptying a second bottle of wine.

Courtaumer, whose hunger was now appeased, lighted a cigar, and began to think of something else, principally of his lost bank-notes, for the money he had left on the card-table the night before would have made his winter very pleasant, and he deeply regretted its loss. Young Bourleroy had been a sharer in the spoils, and Courtaumer felt an even stronger dislike for him than usual. M. Anatole's shrill voice grated upon the nerves of Jacques, who tried his best not to hear a conversation which was likely to irritate him still more. Nevertheless he did hear the name of young Calprenède repeated several times, and though not particularly fond of Arlette's brother he lost no time in swallowing his coffee for fear of overhearing some unpleasant or offensive remark which he might feel a foolish but perhaps irresistible inclination to resent.

He now noticed for the first time that the man whom he had taken for a sailor had stopped short in the middle of his breakfast and had also called for his bill, instead of completing his gastronomic feasts by the absorption of divers liqueurs. "What! no rum or brandy!" Jacques said to himself. "Can I have been mistaken? A sailor who has come on shore to enjoy himself, would not be in such a hurry to leave the table." And with the mobility of sentiment which was one of his greatest faults, Jacques resumed his scrutiny of the stranger, who did not seem to notice that any one was watching him, and who paid his bill without stopping to examine the items. "I should like to know where he is going," thought Madame de Vervins' versatile nephew, "but, I suppose, it would scarcely do to follow him. Heaven only knows where he might take me. Here he comes; how he rolls as he walks!"

The stranger was obliged to pass Jacques to reach the door, and Courtaumer could scrutinize him at his leisure. "Ah, yes, his ears are pierced. A sailor unquestionably; and it seems to me he stole a furtive glance at me. Bah! if he knew me, he would have spoken to me, for he doesn't appear timid by any means. Besides, what do I care whether he knows me or not?"

I don't know what ails me this morning. I seem to have suddenly turned detective. But the stranger has gone and I'll follow his example. It is a good time to take advantage of the sunshine, and watch the carriages on their way to the Bois. I'm sure all the pretty women in Paris will be out to-day."

The prospect of beholding this charming sight made him momentarily forget the conjectures in which he had so recently indulged, and he paid his bill and left the restaurant, keeping his head studiously averted from the corner in which M. Bourleroy was talking even more noisily than ever. Once outside, however, he took the same route as the stranger who had engrossed his attention to such an unreasonable extent, and he could see him strolling leisurely along, some distance in advance.

No more delightful weather could be desired for a promenade. The sky was cloudless, and a faint breeze stirred the leaves on the trees bordering the Champs-Elysées. Handsome equipages were only just beginning to make their appearance, but cabs were already numerous, conveying mothers and children, dressmakers enjoying a day's recreation, and clerks absent on leave, towards the Bois. On either side of the drive sat rows of fashionably clad gentlemen, watching for an opportunity to bow to some leader of society or the occupant of some exceptionally elegant equipage—an excellent way for one to make passers-by suppose that one has a large and fashionable circle of acquaintances, as it matters little whether the bow is returned or not. Courtaumer did not take the trouble to lift his hat to the occupants of any of the carriages, but he could name the owner of each of them, and took not a little pleasure in seeing them file by under his observing eye. He strolled from the Place de la Concorde to the Rond-Point and back three times in succession, without seeing any new face worthy of notice; but on his fourth trip he observed, in a modest turn-out, a lady whom he did not recollect having ever seen in the Champs-Elysées before. She was handsome rather than pretty, her beauty being somewhat of the Goddess of Liberty or Statue of the Republic order, and the carriage was doubtless hired by the month, for the coachman wore a showy livery but extremely shabby gloves. "Ah, ha!" Courtaumer said to himself, "a frigate out on her first cruise. Not a bad-looking craft, but her owner has not squandered much of his substance on her outfit. That old rattle-trap isn't a whit better than a second-rate hackney-coach." The brougham of which Courtaumer had spoken in such disparaging terms, was moving along at a snail's pace, close to the pavement. The woman evidently desired to be seen, and seemed to be looking for someone among the crowd of spectators.

Courtaumer, concluding that it was time to rest, now seated himself under a large tree, where there were several vacant chairs. He reserved one in addition to that which he himself occupied, thinking it possible that some acquaintance would appear, for he intended to remain some time, and hoped that chance would send him an agreeable companion. In the meantime, the society of his cigar sufficed him, and he began to smoke assiduously, without thinking any more of the somewhat imposing woman who had engrossed his attention a moment before. He had also forgotten all about the supposed sailor, and was amusing himself by drawing rings in the sand with the tip of his cane, when, on looking up, he perceived that he had a neighbour—a gentleman who had stealthily taken a seat on his right hand, and who was none other than the very foreigner who had attracted his attention in the restaurant. Was his reappearance due solely to chance, or had he chosen his seat designedly? The last of these supposi-

tions seemed the more probable, and Courtaumer resolved to ascertain why the stranger had thus pursued him.

The man evinced no intention of leaving, but looked down and moved uneasily about in his chair like an embarrassed visitor who wishes to enter into conversation, but does not know how to begin. This significant pantomime strengthened Jacques in his determination to question the man, which he did in no very courteous terms. "Can it be that you take me for a pretty woman?" he asked. "Just now at the restaurant you scarcely took your eyes off me, and now, after following me, you sit down beside me."

"Excuse me, sir," said the man, without manifesting the slightest anger, "I had no intention of intruding, and should be deeply grieved to annoy you; but I should not venture to accost you if—"

"Then it was for the purpose of accosting me that you seated yourself here? You are frank, to say the least of it. Well, what do you want of me?"

"In the first place, to tell me if you did not formerly belong to the naval service, and if you were not once in the China seas on a frigate called the 'Juno.'"

"Well, yes; what of it?"

"I was certain it was you. I recognised you instantly, although it was five years ago that I met you."

"But where did you meet me? Were you one of the 'Juno's' crew?"

"Oh, no, my commander."

"But why do you call me 'my commander' when you never served under me? Besides, five years ago I was only an ensign."

"That's true; but you had command of a gunboat for six months all the same."

"Stationed at the mouth of the Saigon river."

"You left it sometimes?"

"Yes, whenever Chinese pirates were reported along the coast. I have had more than one of them hanged."

"Yes, and had it not been for you I should have ended my days at the end of the yard-arm, although I was as innocent as a new-born babe."

"What! you would have been hanged but for me?"

"That might have been my fate, had I been obliged to deal with any other officer. Don't you remember having captured and burned a Chinese junk near Cape Tram, in the summer of '75."

"After the crew had captured two merchantmen, and massacred all on board. Yes, I recollect it now—infamous scoundrels, those Chinamen, they killed and wounded five of my men. We took only about a dozen of them to Saigon—all the others were killed."

"Oh, they fight like wild beasts, those rascals. But you must recollect that they had a pilot with them who did not belong to their copper-coloured race."

"Yes, a sailor they had found upon one of their prizes, and whom they had spared because he was familiar with the coast, a vigorous fellow—I can see him yet."

"You can, indeed, for he stands before you."

"Impossible! I should have recognised you."

"I am greatly changed. In the first place, they had rigged me out in their heathenish costume. I had even a false pigtail hanging down my back."

"Now I look at you closely, it does seem to me that you resemble the rascal."

"Oh, I was sure you would finally recognise me," replied the ex-pilot, unabashed by this remark, "and now you understand why I tell you that you saved my life."

"I remember now that I had a great mind to have you hanged," replied Courtaumer, coldly.

"And I can't blame you, for I was acting as pilot for the pirates ; but I immediately began to talk to you in French. It was not strange that you should at first have taken me for a deserter from the naval service, or from some merchantman. You questioned me, I told you my story, and even then it was with no little difficulty that I cleared myself of suspicion. It was a fortunate thing for me that I had to deal with an intelligent officer, and I shall never forget how you had the generosity to defend me at Saigon before the maritime commission that tried me."

"You have a better memory than I have. I only vaguely remember that you were acquitted for want of conclusive evidence ; I have no recollection of defending you. I was called upon to give my testimony, and I told what I knew, and believed to be true. I said you had made no resistance when my men boarded the junk, and that, however improbable your story was, it might have a faint basis of truth."

"Yes, it was true, and if my judges had felt any doubt on the subject they would have condemned me."

"Hum ! it seems to me the Chinamen stated that you were familiar with their language."

"I speak many, or indeed, almost all languages with more or less fluency. I have knocked about the world a good deal."

"They also asserted that you had joined them voluntarily. They even added that you had delivered up to them the vessel you had formerly belonged to."

"That was false. The Chinese are inveterate liars."

"I don't deny it. There was no one to testify against you, as all your companions had been disposed of, and you were released, as was only right under the circumstances ; but this is no reason why I should pine for your company."

"I have no desire to force it upon you," replied the sailor, suddenly changing his tone. "I recognised you in the restaurant, and thought I ought to thank you, never having been able to do so before, for when I was set at liberty you had left Saigon. But I require nobody's help now."

"So you have made a fortune ?" inquired Courtaumer, eyeing his companion from head to foot.

"Yes. I engaged in the transport of Coolies to Bourbon and Mauritius, and made a great deal of money in the business—enough to support me very handsomely in Paris."

"So much the better for you ; but I still fail to see why you should desire to speak to me."

"Merely to offer you my thanks, as I have already had the honour of telling you."

"And I repeat that you have no cause for gratitude."

"Very well, sir ; I won't insist. But do you object to my retaining the seat I have chosen ?"

"The Champs-Elysées belong to the public," replied Courtaumer, turning his back upon his persistent neighbour. He was strongly inclined to leave his seat, but he fancied that the intrusive fellow would make no further advances after the rebuff he had received, and that he would not

tarry long beside a gentleman who had treated him with such scant courtesy.

He was mistaken. The former pilot lighted an immense cigar, and after drawing a few puffs, he remarked with imperturbable composure : " You must excuse me, sir, I am not familiar with the customs here. I ought to have known, though, that in Paris, if any one wishes to speak to another person, he must first obtain an introduction under penalty of being considered an adventurer ; but I thought such ceremony might be dispensed with between sailors."

" Between sailors ! " repeated Courtaumer, scornfully. " In the first place, I'm no longer a sailor, and even if I were—"

" You would not belong, like me, to the merchant service, I know that ; but to prove that I am not a mere adventurer, I thought I would tell you that I have influential friends here, who can vouch for me, if necessary. I will mention one in particular, because he isn't only a millionaire, but well known in Paris. His name is Baron Matapan ; you must have heard him spoken of."

Just as Courtaumer was opening his mouth to consign Baron Matapan's friend to regions never mentioned in the hearing of ears polite, a hand was laid on his shoulder, and, turning round, he saw Albert Doutrelaise standing behind him. " What ! is it you ? " he exclaimed. " You come just in time to rescue me from a very unpleasant position."

" Still, this seems to me an excellent place from which to watch the drive."

" Yes, the place is good enough ; but I am going to leave it. I don't fancy my neighbours. Come, let us take a turn." And without even honouring the troublesome pilot with a glance, Courtaumer rose, took his friend's arm, and dragged him away with such energy that he overturned his chair.

This time the persistent foreigner must have acknowledged his defeat, for he made no attempt to follow them. He had scrutinized Doutrelaise closely, but that was all, and with a shrug of the shoulders he now turned to watch the carriages filing by. " Who is that peculiar-looking person who was speaking about my landlord ? " inquired Doutrelaise.

" Ah, that's true ! the house you live in belongs to Matapan ! " exclaimed Jacques. " I had forgotten the fact, although you told me so only yesterday, but how on earth he happens to have any acquaintance with the scoundrel you have just seen, and who has been pestering me with his attentions for half-an-hour, is more than I can understand."

" But how do you happen to know him ? His acquaintance with Matapan is nothing extraordinary—it strikes me they would be rather congenial, but you don't belong to their set."

" Strange things happen every day, my friend. This scoundrel was a sailor when I met him in Cochin-China, five years ago. I captured a Chinese junk, manned by pirates, and he was on board acting as pilot. My first impulse was to have him hanged ; but, naturally enough, he objected to being disposed of in that way. He pretended that he had been taken prisoner by the pig-tails, who had only spared his life on condition that he would serve as pilot. I was good-natured enough to listen to his story, and to take him to Saigon, where I handed him over to the authorities, who finally released him for want of any conclusive evidence against him."

" And where did you meet him this morning ? "

" At the Café des Ambassadeurs, where he was breakfasting like a

prince. When I left he came and seated himself beside me under the tree where you found me. He had the assurance to remind me of his adventure, under the pretext of thanking me for having saved him from the hanging which, I am sure, he richly deserved."

"But why did he speak of Monsieur Matapan?"

"To show me that he had influential acquaintances in Paris. He pretends that your landlord is an intimate friend of his."

"That is very strange. Do you know this man's name?"

"I must have known it years ago, but I have forgotten it now, and I assure you I did not ask him it. If you are so inclined, it will be easy for you to learn it by questioning Matapan."

"I shall do nothing of the kind," replied Doutrelaise quickly. "But pray explain how you happened to breakfast in the Champs-Elysées when you must have been expecting me to call on you, for I have just been to your rooms."

"Then you did not receive my second note?"

"No, I went out at eleven o'clock, and the first letter informed me so explicitly that I mustn't lose a moment in extricating you from your trouble, that I was anxious to keep my appointment."

"In that I recognize you. The race of friends like yourself is rapidly becoming extinct."

"Bah! there's no great merit in obligeing you. You are the best pay I know. How much do you want? Feel no hesitation about naming the amount. I know it must be large, for I have seen some one who was at the club last night, and who told me that you had lost at least twenty-five thousand francs."

"Twenty-five thousand six hundred is the exact amount. Your informant was well posted. I'll bet that it was your neighbour, Anatole Bourleroy."

"You are greatly mistaken. I shun him as I would the plague, and whenever I am unfortunate enough to meet him, I invariably avoid speaking to him if possible. This morning he came in just as I was going out, and I scarcely bowed to him."

"I also met him this morning, breakfasting at the Ambassadeurs—with the money he won probably, and I cut him. But about the loan I thought of asking of you—I have reflected, and decided to do without it. I owe nothing, and economy will soon bring me safely out of my difficulties, so keep your money for greater need, my old fellow."

"That will present itself, I don't doubt," was Doutrelaise's laughing response. "I don't think your wisdom will be of long duration. Besides, you are not the only young man who needs money. Only this morning—"

"Look at the brougham that is just passing," Courtaumer interrupted, pressing his companion's arm. "That's a new recruit, my dear fellow, a pretty girl I have never seen before, and whom I had just discovered as you came up."

"That brunette with a sealskin cap?"

"Yes, the one who is nodding and smiling at a gentleman whom I can scarcely see behind that large tree."

"Oh, yes, I see. No; her face is not strange to me. She looks very like—Upon my word, it's Lélia, the majestic Lélia."

"And who, pray, is Lélia?"

"Lélia Marchefroid, the daughter of the doorkeeper of the house I live in."

"I recollect now. You told me her respected father destined her for the stage. She will make her way there. She has secured an admirer already. Look, he is turning to smile upon her. He wears gold spectacles like the illustrious Prudhomme—"

"The farce is complete," exclaimed Doutrelaise. "That gentleman is none other than Monsieur Bourleroy, senior."

"What!—the druggist you had the impertinence to propose to me as a father-in-law?"

"The same, my dear friend. His daughter Herminie will have a dowry of half a million at least."

"If her wicked father doesn't squander his substance in the society of *débutantes*."

"Impossible! he's too stingy to do that. But now that I'm posted in regard to his conduct and the morality of Monsieur Matapan's doorkeeper, if they take it into their heads to do me or any of my friends an injury, I have them in my power."

"But look! Mademoiselle Lélia has seen us. She is drawing back into her carriage, and the horse is quickening his pace. Bourleroy must also have perceived us, for he is moving away. Let us turn back, my good fellow; I have had enough of the Bourleroys," said Courtaumer, taking the arm of his friend who very willingly acceded to the request.

They walked on for some time in silence. Courtaumer was not yet consoled for his losses, and his gloominess was increased by the thought of the tiresome evening he was to spend at his aunt's. Doutrelaise on his side was still engrossed with the strange adventure of the previous night, and he was wondering if he should not relate the whole affair to the friend he usually consulted in all his difficulties. "You seem to have met a number of people this morning," he remarked, after a long silence. "Did you happen to run against Julien de la Calprenède anywhere?"

"Julien de la Calprenède?" repeated Courtaumer. "No; I haven't seen him to-day."

"Did you see him at the club last night?"

"Yes, I believe he was there. But I was so busy with the game that I did not notice him particularly, still it does seem to me I saw him hanging around the *baccarat* table like a famished person hangs outside a baker's shop. He must be terribly hard up."

"I am afraid so. But tell me, was he at the club when you arrived there? You went straight to the club on leaving me, didn't you?"

"Yes, and almost on the run; I fancied I should be lucky last night. It was a delusion that cost me dear."

"And was young Calprenède there before you?"

"No; he didn't come in until some time afterwards, at least, I think not, for I did not see him on arriving. But why do you ask me all these questions?"

"Because the poor fellow wrote to ask a favour of me this morning."

"Money, I suppose?"

"Yes, he has lost—but not so much as you of course."

"If he had, I don't think there would be much hope for his creditors."

"He has but one, but it would be much better for him if he had a dozen like yourself. Unfortunately, he owes Monsieur Bourleroy six thousand francs."

"Lélia's admirer?"

"No; the father doesn't play. It was the son who won it from him at *écarté*, on credit of course."

"Then I pity your young friend. Everybody will know that he doesn't pay his debts. Anatole will proclaim the fact from the housetops. I would wager anything that he was telling his friends of it at breakfast this morning."

"I only wish I had been there," muttered Doutrelaise.

"So that you could have pulled his ears, eh? I shouldn't have minded doing so myself, but I had no right to undertake the defence of a young fellow I scarcely knew. Besides, Bourleroy will soon be obliged to hold his tongue, as he will get his money; for I know you. You have already lent young Calprenède the six thousand francs no doubt."

"No, but I was about to do so when Julien, who was breakfasting with me at the *Café de la Paix*, abruptly went off."

"Without accepting the money? He must be mad!"

"No; I think he didn't wish to receive it in the presence of Monsieur Matapan, who had just come in and who seated himself beside me without asking permission to do so."

"Just as my pirate did beside me a moment ago. I'm not surprised at their friendship. One seems as ill bred as the other. But I know why Julien hurried off. Matapan must have lent him some coin which he can't repay."

"The same thought occurred to me, and as soon as Matapan took himself off, I ran after Julien; but although I went to the club and sent to his father's house, he was nowhere to be found."

"Bah, he will turn up again all right."

"I fear his mind is scarcely right. His situation is so compromising that—"

"That you fancy he has thrown himself in the Seine, and all for some trifling debts his father will pay sooner or later. Nonsense! I don't believe that. If he had committed any disgraceful action, it would be entirely different; but that is impossible. He bears a name that would prevent that."

Doutrelaise made no reply. Courtaumer had unconsciously placed his finger on the wound. However Doutrelaise hesitated to relate the history of the necklace. Had he any right to consult his friend in a matter affecting Julien's honour? He was already almost sorry that he had said so much: Courtaumer was not M. Matapan certainly, but Courtaumer was not always discreet.

"You seem to take a great interest in this hare-brained fellow," Jacques remarked. "I didn't know you were so intimate with him."

"Intimate isn't the word, but—"

"Come, confess that it is on the sister's account."

"I have already begged you to say no more on that subject. Mademoiselle de la Calprenède is not the cause of it, and yet you persist in harping upon that theme."

"I have a reason, and a very good reason, for referring to the subject to-day."

"What is that?" inquired Doutrelaise, greatly astonished.

"Would you like to know? Then prepare to be surprised. My aunt has taken it into her head to marry me to that young lady. Ah! you are turning green with jealousy. So I was right, you do love her."

"You marry her! Why, you scarcely know her."

"That doesn't matter. Answer me now, truthfully, do you love her or not?"

"And if I say that I don't, shall you marry her?"

"If you tell me that you don't, I cannot say what I shall do; but if you answer in the affirmative, I shall tell my aunt that nothing will induce me to interfere with the hopes of my best friend."

"And I forbid you to mention my name in this affair," was Albert's quick response. "No one suspects that Mademoiselle de la Calprenède has inspired me with a sentiment which—"

"Well, you have made a confession at last, and you are quite right, for I might have indulged in a flirtation with Mademoiselle Arlette who is very charming. Now, however you need have no fears, I will not even look at her, at least, not until she is Madame Doutrelaise, for I intend you to marry her, and you shall do so. I will do all I can to bring it about."

"But you can do nothing."

"How do you know? The father is the friend of my aunt Madame de Vervins, who is an excellent woman. I will persuade her to plead your cause."

"No, Jacques, pray don't speak of me to her. You would only do me an injury by trying to serve me. Later on perhaps—but the time has not yet come."

"Well, I will content myself with leaving the coast clear then. You can depend upon it that I shall inform my aunt this evening of my firm resolve to remain a bachelor to the end of my days. And now that this question is settled, shall we make the tour of the Bois and return to the club in time for dinner?"

"No, I have some business to see to. I am compelled to leave you now."

"To run after your future brother-in-law?"

"Jacques, you are incorrigible."

"Well, well, start off, my dear fellow, in pursuit of this strange Julien who runs away when one wishes to do him a favour. I shall soon see you again, and if I find Julien—"

"In that case please tell him that I am looking for him."

"Not another word. Here comes his father, the Count de la Calprenède in person. He is coming straight towards us. He has seen us already and there is no way to avoid him. Besides, I am not sorry to know what he has to say to us." The count was indeed approaching with a hurried step. "He doesn't appear to be in a very good humour," muttered Courtaumer. "Can he have heard of any new escapade on the part of his son?"

Doutrelaise saw very plainly that there was a heavy frown on M. de la Calprenède's brow, and he felt strongly inclined to make his escape. Had he known that the count was thinking of him at that very moment, he would certainly have run off at the top of his speed; but he knew of no reason why he should reproach himself, and so he resolved to make the best of it, and stand his ground. Formal bows were exchanged, and then M. de la Calprenède, entirely ignoring Doutrelaise, offered his hand to Courtaumer, and said: "I am glad to meet you, sir, and I should like to speak to you a moment alone." He drew him a little aside as he spoke, and then added abruptly: "My son belongs to your club, doesn't he? Yes? Very well; if you should meet him there this evening, I should be greatly obliged if you would inform me of it. I fear he will not return home until late, and it is absolutely necessary for me to see him at the earliest possible moment. I shall be at Madame de Vervins' between nine

and eleven, and shall afterwards return home to the Boulevard Haussmann."

"Depend upon me, count," replied Courtaumer. "I have promised my aunt—" But he did not finish his sentence, for the count was already some distance off. Courtaumer then turned to rejoin Doutrelaise, but he also had disappeared. "Upon my word of honour ! every one seems to have gone mad !" Jacques exclaimed. "And I begin to believe that Monsieur Julien must be involved in some disgraceful affair. So much the worse for him ! Albert is really very kind to lend him a helping hand, for to judge by the manner in which the father just treated him, there isn't much chance of his marrying the daughter."

V.

THE Louis XIV. clock, on the mantel-shelf in Madame de Vervins' drawing-room, was just striking nine. As punctual as the great monarch himself, the marchioness had already installed herself in her favourite arm-chair, beside the fire-place in which a bright fire was blazing. Tea had been brought in, after the old style, a tea-pot of Sèvres china doing duty for a Russian *samovar*, for the noble lady did not approve of modern innovations. She was attired in the style which had been in vogue in her youth, with a few sacrifices to the tastes of the day—just enough to prevent her from appearing ridiculous—and she still wore her hair in long curls, thus displaying her beautiful snow-white locks to great advantage. Old she might be, and yet she was a very sprightly, agreeable, and active hostess. Her grey eyes sparkled with fun, and many a brilliant witticism came from her thin lips. She saw everything, read everything, and knew everything, and yet no shade of malice ever marred her charming gaiety. Jacques could truthfully say : "My aunt is a paragon."

On this particular evening her face wore an expression of importance, and her manner was rather more brusque than usual. "My nephew has not come ?" she inquired of the old servant, attired in black, who was engaged in arranging the cups and saucers upon the tea-tray.

"Not yet, madame," replied the man, who had been in the service of the family at least fifty years.

"You will admit no one except him and the Count de la Calprenède."

"Very well, madame," replied the old servant.

"Have you lighted the fire in the library, François ?" the marchioness next asked. "Monsieur Jacques cannot exist for three hours without smoking, and I don't wish him to stifle me here."

"Monsieur will find a box of cigars on the mantel-shelf."

"Of the brand he likes ?"

"I bought them from the steward of his club."

"Very well ; you may retire. But when the count comes, don't announce him too loud. For some time past you have had a habit of shouting out the names as if you were the usher of a republican minister."

François went out without uttering any protest, although he was strongly tempted to do so. He shared the political sentiments of his mistress, and the comparison wounded him deeply. The marchioness, thus left alone, fell into a doze, according to her habit after dinner ; but she did not sleep like a common-place mortal who has partaken too freely of truffles. Hers was a light, refined slumber, which did not prevent her from meditating,

and she usually thought of her favourite nephew, especially whenever he had caused her any fresh anxiety. And this was the case now. "If I don't interfere, the boy will certainly ruin himself," she ruminated, half closing her eyes. "He is as thoughtless as a linnet, and he laughs at poverty as I laugh at a cold in the head. He talks of entering the merchant service with appalling indifference, and he is quite capable of doing as he says. His father was as thoughtless as himself, and as badly reared; but, after all, I like his disposition far better than that of his prudent and sagacious brother."

With this consoling reflection she closed her eyes altogether and fell into a sound sleep, though it did not last for long. A nap of a quarter of an hour sufficed her. On waking up she promptly resumed the thread of her discourse. "Such folly can be cured only by marriage," she murmured; "so he must marry, and immediately. One of these fine mornings I may awake in another world, and then who would select a proper wife for him? Fortunately I have one all ready. Arlette is the best girl I know, and as pretty as heart could desire. A trifle sad, perhaps, and a little inclined to be sentimental. But she will soon get over that. I am going to have a plain talk with my old friend Calprenède this evening. Jacques suits him, and we will manage to overcome the young fellow's objections without much difficulty, I'm sure of it. Hum! I believe the dear count is a ruined man; but I know him, and I'm sure that he is not actuated by mercenary motives in wishing to bring about a marriage between Jacques and his daughter. He is proud as Artaban, and if I ventured to allude to what I mean to do for my nephew, he would very likely take offence."

The marchioness had proceeded thus far in her soliloquy, when François announced, "Monsieur le Comte de la Calprenède."

"You are welcome, my friend," said Madame de Vervins. "Your coming is most opportune. I was almost falling asleep. I am even afraid that I *have* had a short nap. See what it is to be old. Do you remember the time when I waltzed till daylight? No, you were not waltzing in those days. I always forget that you are twenty years younger than myself."

The count pressed the hand that Madame de Vervins extended to him; but she exclaimed: "Fi! where did you pick up these English manners? My hand is still white enough to kiss, I hope. In former years, my dear friend, you didn't omit doing so."

M. de la Calprenède thereupon acquitted himself of this obeisance without the slightest embarrassment. Brought up in a circle where women were always treated with chivalrous deference, he had not yet forgotten the charming customs of the past; but no smile appeared upon his lips, and he seated himself in an arm-chair near by, without uttering a word.

"I opened the siege this morning, my dear friend," began the marchioness. "Jacques did not surrender at the first shot; but if we manoeuvre skilfully, I am sure that he will finally capitulate. But I think it will be necessary for our dear Arlette to help us a little."

"Oh, not now," continued Madame de Vervins, as she saw the count shake his head. "We have not yet gone beyond the preliminaries, and Jacques is as unmanageable as a frisky young colt. If I proposed a formal presentation to your daughter, he would run off without a moment's warning. But we must employ the old methods, which are perhaps the best, after all. We will arrange to have them meet as if by chance. They might do so at the theatre, in a box at the opera, or the Français; but theatre-going is an amusement scarcely suited for a woman of my years. On the

other hand, you have not entertained at all for a year or so ; and, by the way, may I be allowed to ask how your business affairs are progressing ?”

“Matters remain unchanged,” was the count’s rather gloomy reply.

“They will result all right by-and-bye, but I hope you will engage in no more business enterprises. You are not particularly adapted to enriching yourself in such pursuits, and I am sorry you ever engaged in them. But to return to our great scheme. What if I gave a ball ? No ; that would not do ; it is fifteen years since there was any dancing here. Jacques would mistrust me at once. A musical evening would be better, perhaps. What do you think ? No response ? You certainly are not at all like yourself this evening. What has happened ? You certainly can have nothing to conceal from an old friend like me.”

“No, nothing,” replied M. de la Calprenède, with a visible effort, “for I came to confide my troubles to you, and ask your advice.”

“I am entirely at your service. What has happened ?”

M. de la Calprenède hesitated for a moment, and then hastily, like a man who wishes to prevent the possibility of reconsidering his resolve, he began : “Marchioness, what would you do if you had a son, and that son was a thief ?”

“My dear friend,” Madame de Vervins quickly replied, “you must allow me to say that yours is an absurd supposition. If I had a son, he might be guilty of many an act of folly, like my nephew Jacques, but commit a base act—no, a thousand times, no ! I am a Courttaumer, as you are a Calprenède ; and when a man bears a name like ours, he does not dishonour it. He squanders his fortune, perhaps,” she added, smiling, “and that is quite bad enough.”

“I have done that,” said the count bitterly ; “but my son has done far worse. He has disgraced himself.”

“Julien ? Impossible !”

“He has. He has committed a theft.”

“Poor boy ! Really, I am astounded. How did it happen ? Explain, Robert, I entreat you ; I do not understand.” M. de la Calprenède remained silent. He was weeping. “It was at the gaming-table, was it not ?” continued the marchioness, deeply moved. “It was there, in a moment of madness—oh, how terrible ! And this is what the frequentation of those gambling dens called clubs, leads to ! And Jacques spends his whole time there ! If he ever sets foot there again, I’ll cut him off without a shilling !”

“You are mistaken, marchioness,” said the count, repressing his tears. “Julien has not cheated at cards. He has stolen, I tell you, stolen like men who are sent to the galleys. He entered an apartment last night by means of a false key, and abstracted a necklace of great value. Do you understand now ?”

“A necklace ? My God ! what use could he turn it to ? Oh ! I know —to give to some girl whom he is infatuated with. The wretched creatures ! Before the Revolution we could at least shut them up in a reformatory when they ruined our children, but now we can do nothing—liberty is a fine thing !”

“You are again mistaken. He has not even the excuse of passion. He took this necklace to pawn or sell it. He owes money, and wished to pay it.”

“Gambling debts, no doubt. But the poor fellow must have lost his senses. Why didn’t he apply to my nephew ? He would have lent him all

the money he wanted. But your son is proud ; he was unwilling to humiliate himself by borrowing."

" He preferred to steal ! " said M. de la Calprenède, in a tone which sent a thrill through the marchioness's heart.

" Steal ! steal ! " she exclaimed ; " that frightful word is the only one you seem able to utter ; but in spite of what you say, Robert, I can't believe that your son has been guilty of such baseness. I don't know him well, for he has not often done me the honour of calling upon me. He is like all young men of the present day—sadly deficient in respect and politeness. But I have met him, and I am an adept in reading character. His is an ardent, indomitable, restless, and daring nature, but he is neither a rascal nor a coward."

" I once thought as you do," muttered the unhappy father.

" Have you any proof to the contrary ? Are you sure he is guilty ? And in the first place, who is his accuser ? "

" A man whom I hate and despise—the owner of the house in which I live. He is called, or calls himself, Baron Matapan."

" He is married, then ? "

" No : he pretends that this necklace is a family heirloom."

" That's a mere invention. No man of any position is named Matapan."

" He is very rich, and has a fondness for collecting jewels."

" That may be. I don't deny that the necklace may belong to him. What leads him to suspect Julien ? "

" An incident which occurred in the house last night, and with which Monsieur Doutrelaise, a fellow-tenant, acquainted him."

" Doutrelaise ? Why, he has often been a guest at my house. I have frequently invited him, to please my nephew, who is very intimate with him. He was singing his praises to me no later than this morning. Ah, well, what did this gentleman see ? "

" He saw nothing ; it was dark at the time, but he heard a man leave Monsieur Matapan's apartment and enter mine."

" And it is upon such proofs as these that Matapan bases his accusation ! Bah ! this is absurd."

" I told him so when he ventured to make it in my presence, and then turned him out of my rooms, all the more eagerly as he had the audacious insolence to propose that I should purchase his silence by giving him my daughter, for he wishes to marry her."

" Such audacity is simply absurd. Arlette is not for a man like him. But why do you persist in asserting that your son is guilty of the crime with which he is charged ? "

" Why, this morning, after showing Monsieur Matapan to the door, I found the necklace that had been stolen from him," replied the count, in a tone of profound dejection. " Yes, I found it in the study adjoining Julien's bed-chamber."

" Oh ! " murmured the marchioness, clasping her hands.

" Yes ; the unfortunate boy had placed it in a cabinet there, but had neglected to take away the key."

" That's incomprehensible. But had you previously seen this necklace, as you were able to identify it as the one stolen from Monsieur Matapan ? "

" He had described it to me. I knew it was composed of large opals, surrounded by tiny diamonds."

" Indeed ! but what did your son say when you made this discovery ? "

" He was not there ; but, unluckily, Arlette was."

"Poor child ! And how did she bear such a terrible shock ?"

"She swooned in my arms, and I left her in a pitiable state. If she dies, her brother will have killed her."

There was a silence. Madame de Vervins seemed engrossed in thought. "My friend," she said, after some moments had elapsed, "I understand your grief and anger now. Your son has been afflicted with an attack of madness; but such maladies must be subjected to heroic treatment. What do you intend to do ? And in the first place what has become of this fatal necklace ?"

"Here it is," replied M. de la Calprenède after a moment's hesitation.

The marchioness took it and examined it with mingled curiosity and loathing. It seemed to her that the jewels would burn her fingers if they came in contact with them. "It is strange," she muttered, examining them more closely, "but it seems to me I have seen this ornament somewhere before."

"Where ?" inquired M. de la Calprenède, eagerly.

"Really, I don't know ; but on examining that peculiar setting, I was vaguely reminded of my infancy. It seemed to me this was not the first time those opals had sparkled before my eyes. But I may be mistaken, the recollection is at best greatly confused, and it matters little after all. Let us return to the discussion of more important matters. You told me just now, that your son was not at home when you made this unfortunate discovery : but haven't you seen him since the morning ?"

"No," replied M. de la Calprenède, shaking his head. "I have been looking for him all day without being able to find him. I have been twice to his club, but he was not to be found."

"But he was there last night, was he not ?"

"I suppose so ; he must have returned there after concealing the necklace."

"Very ineffectually and carelessly ; for he did not even take the key from the cabinet, in which he had placed the jewels."

"Yes," replied the count, bitterly, "he has not yet learned to take fitting precautions. He is a bungling thief, as yet."

"Thief ! I cannot bear the word," replied the marchioness. "You really should not condemn him without a hearing, and he will certainly return to the house."

"For the jewels he has left there ? I don't doubt it. He will probably return at an hour when he expects to find us all asleep ; but I shall be watching for him. If he returns before I do, I shall be immediately apprised of the fact, for I have given Arlette's maid orders to send for me ; and if he goes to the club while I'm here, Monsieur de Courtaumer, whom I met in the Champs-Elysées, has promised to inform me without delay."

"Jacques ? How does he happen to be mixed up in the affair ?"

"I asked him to do me this favour, but he is quite ignorant of what has occurred."

"So you may be obliged to leave me at any moment to join your son ? You are right, my friend, and you must come to a decision before leaving here. But what if the poor boy has killed himself in a fit of despairing remorse !"

"You judge him too favourably. He has fallen too low to have the necessary courage for such an act. If he had intended to put an end to his life he would have destroyed the proofs of his guilt ?"

"Why ? I do not see that."

"Since he hid the necklace, he intended to make use of it."

"If he intended to sell it, you must confess it would have been much easier for him to have taken it away in his pocket," replied Madame de Vervins, laying the fatal necklace upon the table. "But I think, like you, that he hasn't committed suicide. He cannot be devoid of Christian feeling. Besides, suicide wouldn't help the matter; it is far better to atone for any fault one may have committed. And Julien will atone for his, I'm sure. You must now decide what you are going to do with him."

"I ought to blow his brains out."

"A pretty way to repair the evil. Do you forget that you have a daughter? Poor Arlette! what would become of her, pray, if she had neither father nor brother to protect her? Such an act would only bring you before the Assizes. Now-a-days paternal authority is not recognised to the extent of giving the head of a family the power of life and death over guilty children. No, you must induce Julien to go into voluntary exile, and make him promise not to set foot in Paris again until he has thoroughly reformed. I am certain that you will succeed in doing this. Julien has a good heart; and it will be easy to bring him back to the right path if you treat him kindly. Will you allow me to help you in this task, or even to undertake it alone?"

"Yes, certainly; but it is too late. Matapan has already entered a complaint."

"What! the scoundrel has dared—"

"He threatened to do so this morning, and I have no doubt but what he has kept his word."

"But in that case, your son may be arrested at any moment," murmured the marchioness, shaking her head; "and yet, it seems to me impossible that a young man, whose past has been irreproachable, and who bears an honoured name, should be treated like a common malefactor."

"On the contrary, the severest penalty of the law will be inflicted upon him."

"That may be. Still, proofs will be necessary, and the gossip of Monsieur Doutrelaise is all there is against him."

"Here is one proof," said the count, pointing to the necklace, which was glittering in the light of the tapers.

"But it is not in possession of the authorities," replied Madame de Vervins, "and they will never think of coming here to look for it. It is very fortunate that you found the necklace, for some one else might have discovered it, and in that case—"

"Julien would be lost I know. I have been expecting a visit from a commissary of police all day. None has come, but a search will probably be instituted to-morrow—"

"It will result in nothing, as the necklace is no longer there."

"People will say that my son has concealed it elsewhere. Every one in the house will be against him; no one will believe in his innocence. Doutrelaise won't retract the statement which has served as the basis of the accusation. A certain Monsieur Bourleroy, a retired druggist, who lives on the floor above us, detests me because I declined his acquaintance. The doorkeeper, a worthless fellow, a free-thinker and a fierce radical, hates me also. They will all try to injure me by accusing Julien."

"They can accuse him, but I defy them to prove his guilt until the pretended heirloom of the Matapan family is discovered."

"Perhaps so, but his disgrace is none the less certain. But will you take the responsibility of keeping this necklace, marchioness?"

"I keep it?" exclaimed Madame de Vervins. "I have no desire to do so, I assure you."

"And I had no intention of leaving it with you. But what shall I do with it?"

"That's true. It won't be safe for you to keep it any longer; I had forgotten that."

"You see that my son's fate is sealed," said M. de la Calprenède, bitterly.

"No, no; there is a way. Matapan's property must be restored to him. It can be done anonymously."

"Do you think that would be an easy matter?"

"It is something that seems to be done every day. I often read of such restitutions in the *Moniteur*."

"It may be easy to make restitution to the government, but how can I return a stolen article to this man without revealing that I am the sender? If I forwarded it by post I should be obliged to give my name; if it was delivered by a messenger, the baron would question him; if I threw it down in front of Monsieur Matapan's door, it would be even worse. They would easily guess whence it came."

"But how would it do for you to go to your landlord and return it in person?" inquired the marchioness, thoughtfully.

"Telling him I had found it? No; I won't tell a falsehood. If Matapan had not insulted me by asking for the hand of Arlette, I should have told him the truth, whatever the consequences of my frankness might have been. We would have questioned my son together, and perhaps he would have exonerated himself. But now that Matapan has threatened me, this is impossible."

Madame de Vervins seemed greatly perplexed, though she was seldom at a loss. At last, after a rather prolonged pause, she remarked: "On reflection, I really don't see why I shouldn't keep these opals for a short time, until we know how this unfortunate affair will end."

"Will you really do so?" exclaimed M. de la Calprenède, eagerly.

"Certainly," was the marchioness's quiet response, "and I shall deserve no great credit for doing so, for if by any chance the necklace should be found, I really don't think anyone will take me for a receiver of stolen goods; nor will my conscience trouble me in the least, as I shall confer a favour upon an old friend without injuring anyone if I keep it. Monsieur Matapan will only be obliged to do without his family opals for a time—no great misfortune truly! In the meanwhile, I shall perhaps succeed in recalling when and where I saw them before. I would give ten years of my life, no, ten months—I am not sufficiently sure of living ten years—yes, I would cheerfully give ten months' existence to ascertain from whom Matapan stole these jewels, for I believe he did steal them."

"This discovery would not exonerate Julien," muttered the count, shaking his head.

"Unfortunately, no; but I repeat, my friend, there is no evidence against him. You, Arlette, and myself are the only persons who know where this necklace was found. You certainly cannot be expected to denounce your son, any more than Arlette can be expected to denounce her brother; and I shall escape examination entirely, as the authorities will have no means of knowing that you have intrusted the necklace to my keeping."

"But some day or other it will be necessary to return it."

"Yes, I will attend to that ; and when Monsieur Matapan receives it, I swear that he sha'n't know who returns it to him, for I shall keep it until this foolish affair is entirely forgotten, and I will devise some way of restoring it to him without his suspecting that the jewels have passed through my hands. And now that we have settled this question, let us return to Julien. He cannot remain in Paris, and—"

Madame de Vervins did not finish her sentence, but abruptly motioned to the count to remain silent. In spite of her seventy years, her sense of hearing was keen, and she had just heard voices in the hall. "It is Jacques, undoubtedly," she remarked. "He promised to come. I wished him to meet you, so that you could talk with him about the enterprise in which you are so deeply interested. I thought, too, that I would take advantage of the opportunity to impress him with the merits of our dear Arlette."

"Don't speak of her. The marriage which we had planned is no longer possible," replied M. de la Calprenède quickly.

"And why not?" exclaimed the marchioness. "It is no fault of Arlette's that—but we have not time to discuss the question now. Of course we mustn't speak of your son in the presence of my giddy nephew. I don't distrust his heart, but I do greatly distrust his prudence."

"He probably comes to inform me that Julien is at the club. I shall go at once—"

The door opened, but François did not announce the visitor who appeared upon the threshold. Faithful to the instructions he had received, the old servant was resolved to admit only Jacques de Courtaumer that evening, and it was not Jacques who was forcing his way into the marchioness's drawing-room. However, it was a gentleman who strongly resembled him, although his manner was rather austere, and he was at least ten years older.

"Why, Adrien, is it you, my boy?" exclaimed Madame de Vervins.

The new-comer she addressed so familiarly was dressed in black, and wore a white cravat. His hair was grey, and his profession was inscribed upon his serious face. It was impossible to doubt for a moment but what he was a magistrate, and certainly he was not accustomed to being addressed as "My boy." "What can have happened?" continued the marchioness. "I dined at your house and left you there not two hours ago. I scarcely expected to see you here this evening."

"I assure you, aunt, that when you left us, I did not anticipate myself that—"

"Explain yourself, instead of constructing well-turned sentences. I hope no misfortune has befallen any of your family."

"No, aunt."

"Then sit down and say what you have to say. I need not introduce you to Count de la Calprenède. You are already acquainted, I am sure."

The two gentlemen bowed, not coldly, perhaps, but without much cordiality of manner. Adrien de Courtaumer was not naturally very affable, and M. de la Calprenède had never taken much pains to ingratiate himself with the magistrate; besides, they both of them had special reasons for maintaining a prudent reserve.

"Now, my dear nephew, tell me the cause of your unexpected appearance," said Madame de Vervins, with a meaning glance at the count, who had risen as if about to leave; on seeing which she added :

"Remain, Robert. Don't go, I beg. We also have something to say to each other, and I suppose Adrien has nothing to tell me that you cannot hear."

"No, aunt," replied the elder of the two Courtaumers, with some little hesitation. "I merely came to consult you."

"What! you too?" exclaimed the marchioness, involuntarily. "And on what subject, pray?"

"About a case that embarrasses me a little—a matter in which I should not be sorry to have Monsieur de la Calprenède's advice as well."

"And what may it be, sir?" inquired the count, who could not repress a nervous start, for this beginning alarmed him. He then resumed his seat near the mantel-piece, and M. de Courtaumer, who was sitting between his aunt and the count, began his explanation by saying: "About a quarter of an hour after your departure, my dear aunt, I received a visit from a brother magistrate, who simply came to spend the evening with my wife and myself, and while talking of legal matters, he casually remarked that I should be called upon to-morrow to investigate a case of theft—a case—"

"And in what way can this possibly interest us?" interrupted Madame de Vervins. "I understand nothing about criminal law, I assure you, and Monsieur de la Calprenède is neither a lawyer nor a magistrate."

"But I am, aunt."

"It would be much better for you if you were not, although it was your chosen profession. But go on, and be as clear as possible, if you have any desire for me to understand you."

"The situation can be explained in a few words. The robbery was committed in a house on the Boulevard Haussmann, the very one in which the Count de la Caprenède resides."

Julien's father turned pale, but M. de Courtaumer was not looking at him as he spoke, and did not notice his change of countenance. The marchioness began to cough to conceal the agitation caused her by this announcement, which was far more clear and explicit than she had anticipated. "Indeed!" she remarked, at last, in a careless tone. "But it is a superb house, and the neighbourhood is one of the best in Paris. Thieves respect nothing nowadays. My dear count, you had better see that there are proper fastenings on your doors—for I hope it was not in your apartment that the robbery was committed. Was it, Adrien?"

"No, aunt; it was in the apartment of Monsieur Matapan, the landlord, who occupies the first floor."

"Ah! and what was stolen?" inquired Madame de Vervins, with an indifferent air.

"Diamonds, I believe; I don't know exactly. My colleague was unable to inform me, not having heard the particulars himself. The complaint was made to-day at about four o'clock. The clerk was unable to give him any of the details, but told him the affair would make a great stir. The case was to be intrusted to me, because it would be necessary to conduct it with great tact and prudence."

"You seem to be indulging in a little self-praise, Adrien. Oh, you need not be ashamed; I know you deserve it. You are a model magistrate—and nephew; that is incontestable. But why is so much talent necessary for the investigation of a common theft?"

"Because it is supposed that the thief is not a professional. There are

good reasons to believe that the robbery was committed by one of the inmates of the house. I have not heard these reasons yet, as I have not been regularly summoned, but it is more than probable that all the occupants of the house will be examined, and by me, necessarily, if I take charge of the case." Adrien paused for a moment, and then resumed :

" It was this circumstance, my dear aunt, that prompted me to consult you. I know that M. de la Calprenède is your friend, and I should undoubtedly be obliged to summon him as a witness ; but I can decline to investigate this case, and I came to ask you what I had better do. I ask this both of you, and of Monsieur de la Calprenède, since a fortunate chance has brought him here this evening."

Neither of the two persons thus addressed answered without taking time for reflection. The marchioness said to herself : " Evidently this is no trap. In the first place, he would not dare to deceive me. He has a great interest in pleasing me, and besides I really think he is fond of me. I know his character. He is cold and practical ; but though he lacks enthusiasm, he is incapable of falsehood, or of even disguising the truth. Besides, he knows no more than he has told us. He is not aware that Julien is suspected of the theft, and he does not even know what was the article stolen. Under these circumstances," thought Madame de Vervins, " I am not sorry that he will have to conduct the investigation. He is just and upright, and he has no prejudices against my poor Robert's son. Instead of being hostile to him, he will be likely to defend him, in case the poor boy is openly accused. My only fear is that he will excuse himself out of delicacy, when he learns that one of our mutual acquaintances is implicated. But I am going to advise him to accept."

While she was engaged in arguments like these, the count on his side was saying to himself : " The magistrate is trying to deceive his aunt and me. He feigns ignorance, but he knows very well that Julien is accused, and as I have never been on particularly good terms with him he would like nothing better than to humiliate me. Still as Madame de Vervins is one of my particular friends, and as he knows she would blame him severely for taking sides against me, he has feigned scruples that he does not feel. He thinks she will tell him to go on ; and to-morrow, when the case is in his hands, and my son's disgrace known, he will apologise for proceeding with the case by saying that it is too late to draw back, and pleading professional duty. I should be mad, indeed, to tell him that I would prefer my son to be examined by some other magistrate. He would never forgive me for my distrust. The best thing I can do is to be silent."

That the marchioness did not share the count's opinion soon became evident. " My dear nephew," she began, " it is my opinion that you are attaching altogether too much importance to a mere trifle. What difference can it make to our dear friend, the count ? I suppose no one will think of accusing him, and what harm would there be in your receiving his testimony, or that of the members of his family ? He isn't afraid to give his evidence before any honourable magistrate. These are your sentiments, are they not, Robert ? "

M. de la Calprenède, thus appealed to, was obliged to give a gesture of acquiescence.

" In that case I will conduct the investigation," said M. de Courtaumer. " I made it almost a matter of conscience ; but I think I exaggerated the difficulties of the situation. I often err in being over-scrupulous."

" A good fault, my dear nephew, when a man is called upon to judge.

others," said Madame de Vervins, smiling. "But speaking of this robbery, it seems to me that Monsieur Matapan has made a great stir about a trifle. He has entered a complaint, you say; that is all very well, but that isn't enough. He must have stated whom he suspects."

"On the contrary, my colleague assured me that he had accused no one."

"Then, of course, no one has been arrested."

"No; the duty of signing a warrant of arrest will devolve upon me. But I must first inquire into the facts upon which the complaint is based and examine the witnesses."

"So the right to send people to prison belongs to you alone," murmured the marchioness, shaking her head.

"Yes, though there are cases—such for instance as those in which a person is caught in the act, when the public prosecutor can order his arrest before I have begun an investigation of the affair, so as to prevent him from escaping to foreign lands—but in that case the prosecutor would inform me of the fact at once. If such was the case in the present instance, I should have been informed of it before now."

"And as you have heard nothing of the kind, it is certain that the culprit is still at large. But won't you take a cup of tea with us?"

"Thank you, aunt, but I promised Theresa that I would return immediately."

"Ah! if your wife is waiting for you, I will not insist. A man should never break a promise made to his wife," said Madame de Vervins, who was not at all anxious to prolong the conversation. "So go, my dear Adrien; Monsieur de la Calprenède will excuse you, I am sure of it. I shall hold you up as a model for your good-for-nothing brother. He solemnly promised to be here at nine o'clock, but has not yet made his appearance."

M. de Courtaumer rose to take leave. As he did so, his eyes fell on the opal necklace which the marchioness had forgotten to put out of sight when he entered the room. She instantly perceived that he was looking at it, but, although greatly frightened for a moment, she felt considerably reassured on seeing what little surprise he evinced. "What magnificent opals!" he quietly remarked, "I did not know you had any. Have you purchased them recently, my dear aunt?"

"What! do you suppose I am buying jewels at my age? The necklace was left with me—for inspection," murmured Madame de Vervins, who felt an almost unconquerable repugnance to uttering an untruth.

"It is superb, truly; but I am sure my wife wouldn't wear it. She is terribly superstitious, and you know there is a strong prejudice against opals."

"There is always some ground for such prejudices," replied the marchioness. "Your wife is quite right not to wear opals, and I advise you never to purchase any for her. Now, my boy, I will detain you no longer. Theresa would blame me if you kept her waiting too long."

Adrien de Courtaumer immediately availed himself of this permission; but, before leaving the room, he bowed to M. de la Calprenède with marked deference.

"My dear Robert, I beg you to forgive my unpardonable negligence," said Madame de Vervins, as soon as her nephew was out of hearing. "I ought to have put this hateful necklace out of sight."

"And I ought to have reminded you that it was on the table. We were both so nervous that we forgot it, and now all is lost. Monsieur de Cour-

taumer has seen it ; and as he will take charge of the case as you advised him, he will learn to-morrow that the stolen article was an opal necklace."

" True ; but he won't suspect me of having stolen it from Monsieur Matapan's jewel-case. The worst that can happen is that he may speak to me on the subject ; but I will have an answer ready."

" But what will you say to him ? " exclaimed M. de la Calprenède, despondently. " He is too clever a magistrate not to guess the truth."

" I don't know what I shall say to him, but I promise to save your son."

" It is, perhaps, too late even now."

" No, for he has not yet been arrested."

" At all events I'm certain that the officers are in pursuit of him. Monsieur Matapan isn't the man to show me any mercy, and even if they have not found Julien as yet, they will soon do so."

" That must be prevented at any cost ; and to do so, it is only necessary to ascertain where he is, and to bring him to me—"

" What ! You will conceal him ? "

" Yes, certainly. I shall keep him here until this affair has blown over. It won't last long. I have a plan. Will you give me *carte-blanche* ? "

" Certainly. But the—necklace ? "

" It is safe here for the present. And now, my friend, I must ask you to leave me. I am going out."

" At this hour ? "

" I must, as that good-for-nothing Jacques has failed to keep his promise. I am sure he is at his club, and I am going there."

" To tell him what has occurred ? You surely won't do that, marchioness ? "

" I am merely going to ask him to wait for your son and bring him to me as soon as he makes his appearance. And I know how my nephew can induce him to comply with my request."

" But what if the unfortunate boy should not go to the club at all ? What if he has already returned home ? And the house is under surveillance, perhaps."

" You can ascertain that by returning home immediately ; but I am not of your opinion. If Julien returns home during the night you are to bring him here without losing a moment. I shall not go to bed, and I will give orders to have you admitted at any hour. He won't refuse to accompany you when he learns that he has been accused, and that he will only be safe under my roof." M. de la Calprenède was going to offer further objections, but just then the door opened, and François entered in answer to the marchioness's ring. " My carriage, " she said, in a tone which admitted of no response from the old servant, and which silenced the count.

VI.

ALMOST all the Parisian clubs are in the same part of the city—between the Rue Drouot and the Quai d'Orsay ; but they are not all alike by any means. Some can show upon their list of members the proudest names that France can boast of, while others richly deserve to be placed under the surveillance of the police. Between these two extremes, there are middle-class establishments, for it does not suffice to be respectable or even fashionable to gain admission into the Jockey Club, and many irreproachable individuals who fear undeserved blackballing are content to connect them-

selves with clubs into which an entrance is easily effected. Jacques de Courtaumer might have reasonably aspired to a very aristocratic institution; but even he feared a number of blackballs, well knowing they are freely given in certain exclusive sets. Besides, he had no time to wait. After three years spent in the China seas, he was eager to become a Parisian again, and that a man cannot be unless he belongs to a club.

The one he had chosen suited him admirably, as it was one of the gayest in the city, and young members were in the majority, though others of mature years were not wanting. Doutrelaise belonged to it, just like Bourleroy, senior, and they never touched a card; while Bourleroy, junior, and Julien de la Calprenède never went there except to gamble. M. Matapan also belonged to this institution, but he was not a frequent visitor.

Doutrelaise had naturally served as sponsor for his friend Courtaumer, who had been elected without opposition, and had soon become a great favourite at the club. He made it his headquarters, dining there and spending most of his nights at the card-table. On the day that his aunt informed him she should expect to see him in the evening, he concluded that it was best to apprise the steward of his intention of taking part in the seven o'clock dinner, so as to be free at nine and keep his engagement with Madame de Vervins. So after being so unceremoniously deserted by Doutrelaise in the Champs-Elysées, he mechanically proceeded in the direction of the club, and decided to while away the afternoon there. He found no acquaintances lounging about, but there were plenty of comfortable arm-chairs in front of a good fire; and he soon fell into a dreamless slumber, from which he awoke only just in time to enter the dining-room where a seat had been reserved for him.

The dinner was good, but Jacques' neighbours were rather prosy, and, to console himself for being obliged to listen to their platitudes, he treated himself to a bottle of Moët's Brut Impérial. This soon restored his cheerfulness, and he finally began to listen to his fellow members who were talking about a new candidate for admission to the club—a kind of nabob who was said to have made an immense fortune in the Indies, and who would stake one hundred thousand francs at the card-table every evening. It is needless to say that many of the players were elated at the thought of winning such a large amount. Others, however, objected to the numerous foreigners who were flocking to Paris, arriving suddenly no one knew whence, and soon vanishing like meteors, without anyone being able to say what had become of them.

"However, this one will at least leave no debts behind him," said a gentleman who was advocating the claims of the candidate, "for he is worth several millions."

"If I were sure he would leave one of them here at the card-table, I would vote for him with both hands," exclaimed a proverbially unlucky player.

"He has a good bondsman," remarked another. "Monsieur Matapan vouches for him."

"That's another millionaire who has sprung up like a mushroom."

"The old serpent!" exclaimed one voice. "He played here but once and then he drained everybody dry."

"What of that? A man has a right to win."

"Yes, provided he doesn't cheat."

"A man doesn't cheat when he is a landed proprietor, and Monsieur Matapan owns several very valuable pieces of property in Paris."

"The house he occupies on the Boulevard Haussmann is one of them."

"We are acquainted with nearly all of the occupants. The Bourleroys, father and son, Monsieur de la Calprenède, and Doutrelaise, your friend," said one of Courtaumer's neighbours turning to him.

"Yes," Jacques replied; "but Doutrelaise is not much better acquainted with his landlord than I am. Who is this Monsieur Matapan, pray?"

"Upon my word! you are asking too much. When he first made his appearance in Paris about ten years ago, it was reported that he had discovered a gold mine, or a deposit of guano—I have forgotten which—for people have long ceased to talk about him. He is a peculiar man, and leads a strange life. He never goes into society or to the theatre; and, in fact, he rarely comes here."

"But he isn't married, I believe."

"No, nor does anyone know of the slightest amorous intrigue in which he has ever taken part."

"Then how does he spend his time?"

"In counting his money, I suppose. It is an agreeable occupation, and seems to suffice him."

"You are entirely mistaken there, gentlemen," remarked a member who had so far taken no part in the conversation. "Matapan is a philosopher who prefers solitude to the society of fools; but he can be agreeable enough when he chooses."

"You must be a favourite of his, as you know him so well. Gentlemen, I can assure you that Falguéras has a special talent for bear-taming. He is the friend of Monsieur Matapan, the cynic. I will even wager that he has been to his house."

"Twenty times," responded Falguéras, who was a big, genial fellow with money enough to live as he liked, and paint in his leisure moments. "We both have a fondness for antique jewels, and he has a remarkable collection which he is fond of showing to amateurs. And I assure you that his life is no more mysterious than his past. He has travelled a great deal, and talks very freely of his adventures. I think he was a sailor in his youth, and he is not ashamed of his former comrades, for I met him just now on the boulevard arm and arm with a man who looked very like a sailor ashore on leave."

"His ears were pierced, were they not?" inquired Courtaumer.

"I didn't notice. Matapan, when I stopped to ask him after his health, seemed to be in a hurry, and we only chatted for a moment."

"His companion, who you say looked like a sailor, was the very nabob who has applied for admission to the club," remarked the member who had started the conversation. "We shall vote for his admission next week."

"Not I," replied Courtaumer, quickly. "I know who your nabob is, and if he is admitted I shall send in my resignation."

This announcement caused evident displeasure. M. Matapan had some warm champions among the guests—millionaires invariably have—and all the card-players present hoped to win some golden spoil from the so-called nabob. Courtaumer, seeing he would be outvoted, allowed the subject to drop, and finished his dinner without taking any further part in the conversation, which soon drifted into another channel.

In the smoking-room, to which he afterwards repaired to sip his coffee before wending his way to the Rue Castiglione, he was joined by Falguéras, who, after installing himself comfortably in an arm-chair beside him, asked point-blank: "You are very intimate with Doutrelaise, are you not?"

"Yes," Jacques replied, rather surprised by this beginning.

"And Monsieur Doutrelaise is very intimate with the Count de la Calprenède's son, is he not?"

"Not exactly. He knows him, and often sees him; they live in the same house, you know. But that's all. However, why do you ask me this question?"

"Because Monsieur Doutrelaise ought certainly to be informed that some very unpleasant reports are abroad about that young man. I am not sufficiently acquainted with Doutrelaise to venture to give him any advice, but I thought that you would perhaps allow me to repeat to you some of the rumours about young Calprenède which have been current here for several days, so that you may inform your friend, if you consider it necessary."

Courtaumer was not at all prepared for these remarks, and felt somewhat annoyed, as he was not fond of gossip; but M. Falguéras' intentions were evidently good, and Courtaumer reflected that Doutrelaise would be interested in knowing what people were saying about Arlette's brother. "I am not generally inclined to meddle with the affairs of others," he replied, after some hesitation, "still, if these rumours are compromising to the young fellow's honour, it would perhaps be as well for Doutrelaise to be informed of the fact. However, what do people say about young Calprenède? that he is in debt?"

"Yes; that he has contracted debts of honour, and that he doesn't pay them."

"He isn't the only one, and it isn't a criminal offence—especially if he means to pay his debts by-and-bye."

"It is a case of expulsion from the club when a stated time has elapsed, as is true in the present instance. He owes the club treasury at least five thousand francs which must be paid up before to-morrow, or the case will be submitted to the committee which can only enforce the rules."

"The amount will be paid before the committee meets, I'm certain of it, for the very simple reason that I know some one who will lend him the money—a friend of mine."

"Indeed! You will perhaps consider me impertinent, but may I ask you if this obliging friend is not Monsieur Doutrelaise?"

"And what if it is?"

"He would act foolishly, I think, to do this young man a service which won't save him, for he owes others besides the treasury."

"Young Bourleroy, eh? I'm aware of that, and think that debt will also be paid. I may as well tell you that Doutrelaise is ready and willing to extricate young Calprenède from his financial embarrassments. He would have done so before this time if he had met him; for he has been in pursuit of him ever since the morning. Have you seen him at the club this afternoon?"

"Calprenède? No, upon my word! and I don't think he will show himself here again very soon, if ever. Everyone is after him it seems. Indeed, Monsieur Matapan, who only spoke to me for a moment, requested me to send him word by messenger if Calprenède came here this evening."

"And did you promise to send Monsieur Matapan word?"

"Certainly I did."

"It seems to me that you have accepted a singular mission. I have no intention of wounding you; but—and I appeal to your own sense of honour

--do you not think that in watching one person on behalf of another, there is something extremely repugnant to any honourable man?"

"Excuse me," replied M. Falguéras, with considerable warmth, "I have no intention of watching any one. I merely desired to do a favour to Baron Matapan, who probably has some important communication to make to young Calprenède."

"If I were in your place, I think I should attach less importance to pleasing Baron Matapan than to offending a young man who has never injured you in any way; I'm sure of it. I am afraid that Matapan is also one of young Calprenède's creditors, and if I'm not mistaken, Calprenède won't be over pleased to be hunted down at the club by means of the information you may supply."

"You are right. I hadn't thought of that, and Matapan can take care of himself. I sha'n't send him any warning whatever. But I really believe that Monsieur Doutrelaise will repent of his generosity, for people tell many hard stories about Calprenède, I assure you."

"By 'people' you mean Anatole Bourleroy, I suppose. I have reason to know that he is circulating all sorts of slanderous reports about the son of a gentleman who is one of my aunt's most esteemed friends, and I sha'n't allow him to attack Julien's character in my presence. I was on the point of pulling his ears in a restaurant this morning for certain whispered remarks of his, the purport of which I could easily divine; and if he ventures to repeat these remarks aloud where I can hear them, I assure you he will receive a severe lesson."

"I really believe he is coming in now," exclaimed Falguéras. "Listen to that shrill laugh. It is certainly he, accompanied by the simpletons who form his court. I hope you aren't going to pick a quarrel with fellows of that stamp."

"No; for I'm going to yield my place to them," replied Courtaumer, draining his cup of coffee. "It is half-past eight, and I have an engagement at nine."

Falguéras, who was of a peaceable disposition, made no attempt to detain his companion; but, just as the ex-lieutenant rose, Anatole and his followers burst noisily into the room. Courtaumer saw that they were all more or less under the influence of liquor, and he gathered from their rather incoherent conversation that they had dined in a neighbouring restaurant, and had come to the club to fetch one of their comrades, and take him to see a young actress, who had given Bourleroy many proofs of her preference, and who would appear in a short farce at the Variétés that night. Jacques did not stop to listen; he was, indeed, about to leave the room, when Anatole boisterously exclaimed: "I bet I'll compel the orchestra to play the 'Marseillaise' during the whole of the first *entr'acte*."

"How much will you bet?" asked one of his gay companions.

"I'll stake the six thousand francs that my Lord Julien de la Calprenède owes me against a hundred."

Courtaumer started as if a wasp had stung him, and walked straight towards the impertinent speaker. "I forbid you to speak ill of Monsieur de la Calprenède," he said, in a most aggressive tone.

"I beg your pardon," stammered the druggist's presumptuous son. "I did not see you, and I did not know that he was one of your friends—besides, I didn't speak ill of him."

"You staked the six thousand francs he owes you against a hundred, which is equivalent to saying that he won't pay you."

"I cannot say that he won't pay me, but I know that he has not yet done so. I have written to him, asking for my money, and he has not even condescended to reply."

Courtaumer began to see that his position was a false one, and that Julien's debt must be paid before he could silence M. Bourleroy. He was also conscious that the neutral members disapproved of the course he had taken. The noise of the quarrel had roused several grave gentlemen who had been dozing before the fire, and disturbed some people playing a rather close game of whist, and everybody was now looking at him, much as the audience in a theatre looks at a person who is disturbing the performance. It was evident, too, that everyone thought him in the wrong. The prudent Falguéras tried to calm him by some remark made in a subdued tone; but Courtaumer when once fairly started was not easily checked. "I repeat that I forbid you to speak of Monsieur de la Calprenède," he said angrily. "If you venture to utter his name again in my presence, I shall punish you as you deserve."

Anatole, completely cowed, hung his head, and mumbled a few unintelligible words: and Courtaumer had just turned his back upon him in token of scorn, when the door of the room was flung open, and Julien de la Calprenède entered in person.

This time every one rose with the exception of one old whist player who had nine trumps in his hand, and who was determined to see the game through to the end. Everybody anticipated a scene, and was wondering how it would end. Of those present, Jacques de Courtaumer was perhaps the most embarrassed, and yet the unexpected entrance of Julien de la Calprenède had completely subjugated Anatole, whose confusion was pitiable to behold. Jacques, however, realized the false position in which he had placed himself by his thoughtless violence. Julien did not come to uphold him, for he was not his friend; Julien was even ignorant that he had undertaken his defence, and if he discovered the fact, he might ask him by what right he had interfered. And what was he doing at the club, this delinquent debtor, threatened with expulsion? And what was he going to say to the creditor who had just ventured to declare he had little hope of receiving the amount due to him?

If he had come to ask for time, Courtaumer would find himself in a most embarrassing position, and would appear to be the unauthorized champion of a man who did not deserve to be defended.

In short, Jacques would willingly have given all the money left in his pocket to have found himself in the drawing-room of the aunt who was expecting him. But retreat was now out of the question, for the excellent reason that it would look very much as if he were flying from the common enemy, leaving the comrade he had just defended so warmly in his clutches. So he remained and waited. Julien paused for a moment near the door. He realised that the company had been talking of him, for the conversation had suddenly ceased, and every one was looking at him. Anatole meanwhile summoned courage to raise his head again. He began to think he might come off conqueror after all. He even hoped that Calprenède was going to apologize for having failed to pay his debt, and thus prove Jacques de Courtaumer to be in the wrong.

Julien was very pale, but not in the least disconcerted. Without noticing any one, not even Jacques, he approached Bourleroy, and, drawing a small roll of bank-notes from his pocket, he handed them to him, saying, coldly: "Here is the money you won from me at *écarté* on the day before yesterday."

This announcement produced an instant revulsion of feeling. Julien's foes suddenly became his friends, and Courtaumer regained confidence. As for Anatole, his face was a study for a painter. He tried to assume a careless air, but he only succeeded in forcing a sheepish smile, as he crumpled the bank-notes in his hand. "See if the amount is correct," said Julien, calmly.

"Oh, I will take your word for that," was the reply. "I assure you was not at all uneasy about my money."

This was such a glaring falsehood that there was a general murmur of protest. Anatole found himself again in a dilemma; the confusion he had expected to see his adversary display had overtaken himself; and young Calprenède did not give him time to recover. "Now that you are paid," he continued, in a clear, ringing voice, "there is no longer anything to prevent me from telling you that I consider you a scoundrel."

"This is doubtless a jest, sir," stammered Anatole.

"I don't jest with persons of your stamp, and I repeat that you are a scoundrel. This epithet will be enough, I think, to make you decide to fight. If I don't receive a visit from your seconds by to-morrow morning, I shall send you mine; and if you refuse to designate yours, I shall proceed from words to deeds. You understand me, don't you?"

"No, I don't understand the meaning of your threats, and I declare I have not insulted you."

"Then I will speak more plainly. I shall inflict personal chastisement upon you every time I meet you, until you have given me satisfaction for the remarks which you made in this room last evening, and which you cannot deny, for I heard them. That will suffice, I hope. You now know the offence for which I demand reparation, and what awaits you if you don't consent to give it. It is for you to decide. I have nothing more to say to you."

"Nor have I anything to say to you," murmured the crestfallen fop, with such an air of abject humility that a couple of his friends, less cowardly than himself, drew him aside and began a whispered conversation with him. They probably reminded him that twenty people were looking on, and that he must show a little more spirit to save the honour of the Bourleroys. In short, they laboured so zealously that Anatole finally succeeded in saying, "I am entirely at your service, sir, but I do not know what remarks you allude to, and I beg you will be more explicit."

He knew that Julien would be unwilling to mention his sister's name in the presence of such a mixed company, and in default of a response, he hoped to make the young fellow seem a simpleton, trying to pick a quarrel about nothing.

But Julien out-generalized him by retorting: "My seconds will specify matters when they meet yours. It does not suit me to repeat your foolish calumnies here. I should have silenced you yesterday if I had not been your debtor, but I am that no longer, as I have just repaid you your six thousand francs."

"I did not ask you for them—I never once asked you for them," exclaimed Bourleroy, glad of an opportunity to renew his attempts at conciliation, "and if you need the amount, to repay the money due to the club treasury for instance, I am perfectly willing to wait."

He instantly perceived that he had been guilty of another blunder, and that his adversary regarded this proposal as a fresh insult. "What right have you to meddle with my affairs?" asked Julien, drily. "Are you

charged with collecting the club money? What business is it of yours whether I owe the treasury money or not?"

"Not the least in the world. It wasn't on my own account that I spoke. I said what I did with the very best intentions."

"I care nothing about your intentions, but I wish to tell you, here in the presence of these gentlemen, that the account to which you have just alluded is settled. Now we will allow this matter to rest until to-morrow." With these words, Julien de la Calprenède left the room as he had entered it, without bowing to any one.

However, Jacques de Courtaumer at once decided to follow him and have a conversation with him. Julien had just risen greatly in his esteem. He felt sure that the money used in paying these debts had been lent by Doutrelaise, and although he thought that Julien had made the scene rather too theatrical, he was pleased to see him display so much spirit, and wished to give him some mark of sympathy. Besides, he thought it would be as well to warn him that M. Matapan was watching for him.

Starting off, he perceived young Calprenède at the end of a passage leading to the antechamber of the club. He must almost have run to traverse such a distance in so short a time, and to stop him, Courtaumer called him by name. Julien turned, recognised Jacques, and retraced his steps, although rather reluctantly. Still, his manner was polite enough when Courtaumer accosted him with these words: "My friend Doutrelaise requested me to tell you that he was looking for you, but I now feel sure that you have met him."

"I saw him at the Café de la Paix this morning," replied Julien, "but I have not seen him since."

"What! the money you just paid that scoundrel—" Julien started, and seemed about to fly into a passion. He restrained himself, however, and Courtaumer continued warmly: "Pray believe that I have no desire to wound you. Our acquaintance is very slight, but we move in the same circle, and we have a mutual friend, so I may, perhaps, venture to say to you that I should have been very glad to accommodate you myself, for Doutrelaise did not conceal from me the fact that you were pecuniarily embarrassed. Unfortunately, I was in the same condition. But I thought our friend had come to your help."

While he was speaking, a footman had approached, and now said in a respectful tone: "Some one wishes to see you in the visitors' room, Monsieur de la Calprenède."

"Who is it?" asked Julien, brusquely.

"The person did not give his name."

"Didn't give his name," repeated Julien, shrugging his shoulders. "Well! go and ask him it. I don't receive people whom I don't know." And as the footman moved away, he called after him: "Make haste. I am in a hurry."

"And I, also, am in a hurry," said Courtaumer. "My aunt, Madame de Vervins, is expecting me; and I remember, now, that I promised to bring you to her house, if I met you."

"I regret that I am unable to accompany you; but I am obliged to return home. I have just treated one contemptible scoundrel as he deserves. Now I have another account to settle."

"Not with Doutrelaise, I hope," said Courtaumer, smiling. "You have a way of annihilating people who offend you."

"Oh! I have nothing against Monsieur Doutrelaise; but there is a man

I loathe, although I am indebted to him pecuniarily. I owe him four thousand francs, and I am going to pay him, so as to be able to tell him what I think of him afterwards."

"So you are going to settle with all your creditors to-day. That's fortunate, and I congratulate you most sincerely, especially if you have not had to borrow of others to do so."

"No, for the very good reason that no one would have lent me a penny, excepting, perhaps, Monsieur Doutrelaise, and I would not allow him to inconvenience himself on my account. But it was absolutely indispensable that I should raise a certain sum of money. I had only fifty napoleons left. The idea of risking them occurred to me, and very fortunately, for in three hours I had won eighteen thousand francs."

"Where? my mouth fairly waters."

"At an establishment I know. A clandestine roulette table, kept by an ex-croupier from Monaco, who is only here for a time. And—only think of my good luck; to-morrow it would have been too late—he leaves for Spain."

"Then gaming saloons are certainly not as black as they are painted. I am no longer astonished if you couldn't be found to-day. You were making a fortune by guessing numbers while everybody was looking for you."

"By everybody, I suppose you mean Monsieur Doutrelaise."

"And your father as well. I met him in the Champs-Elysées, and he particularly requested me to tell you that he wished to see you as soon as possible, and that he would be at my aunt's between nine and eleven this evening."

"I cannot go there. My father will learn why when he returns home, for I shall be there."

"Does your last creditor reside in the same house as yourself, then?"

"Yes, and I am in a hurry to settle my account with him."

"I would wager a handsome amount that it is Baron Matapan."

"Do you know him?" exclaimed Julien.

He was evidently about to ask Jacques the nature of his acquaintance with the baron, when he noticed that the footman had just returned from the visitors' room, and so, turning towards him, he inquired: "Have you brought me the card of the person who wishes to see me?"

"No, sir," replied the servant, evidently much embarrassed. "The gentleman told me—"

"Then it is a gentleman?" cried Courtaumer, gaily. "I fancied it was a lady. Men don't affect such mystery as a rule."

"Well, what did he say to you?" inquired Julien, impatiently.

"He told me," replied the footman, lowering his voice—"he told me he was a Commissary of Police."

"You are mad!"

"Excuse me, sir, I saw his sash of office."

"Then there must be some mistake," said Jacques. "He certainly can-not wish to see Monsieur de la Calprenède."

"He asked for him, sir, and even added that if Monsieur de la Calprenède refused to comply with his request for an interview, he should be obliged to come upstairs."

"That is a little too much," exclaimed Julien, indignantly. "Go and tell him I am coming."

Jacques' face suddenly clouded. He did not for one instant suppose that

the son of the Count de la Calprenède had been guilty of any crime, but the words, Commissary of Police, had anything but a pleasant sound.

Julien appeared more indignant than alarmed. "It seems to me everything is conspiring to delay me. I can't go off now until I ascertain what this man wants," he remarked, bitterly.

"Can the police have made a descent upon the establishment where you gambled to-day?" inquired Courtaumer, laughing. "No; that's hardly likely. In such cases they arrest the proprietor, but don't trouble themselves about the players. I wonder what this commissary can have to say to you?"

"You would oblige me very much by going to receive him with me."

"I should like nothing better, although I promised to be at my aunt's at nine o'clock. It is ten now, so I sha'n't escape a scolding in any case. But I suppose your conversation with this official won't occupy much time?"

"I suppose not. Come, since you are kind enough to accompany me."

"I am also ready to assist you in another way—that is, if you will do me the honour to choose me as your second in your duel with Bourleroy."

"I should not have dared to ask this favour of you, but I gladly accept your offer," was Julien's quick response.

They had now reached the anteroom, and the servants helped them to put on their overcoats. The visitors' room was on the floor below, at the foot of the staircase, near the entrance of the hall leading to the boulevard. At the door the porter was holding an animated conversation with two shabbily-dressed men who seemed inclined to make their way into the hall. Jacques and Julien scarcely noticed this, but entered the visitors' room, which was an elegantly-furnished apartment. There, standing with his hat in his hand, was an eminently respectable-looking gentleman whom they would have mistaken for a member of the club, had they not seen a tri-colour sash gleaming under his overcoat, which had been intentionally left open. His face was intelligent, and expressive of so much geniality and benevolence, that the two young men immediately felt at ease.

"Which of you is Monsieur de la Calprenède, gentlemen?" he inquired with great politeness.

"I am he," Julien replied.

"And this gentleman?"

"Is one of my friends."

"I should like to speak to you in private."

"This gentleman can hear all you have to say to me. In fact, I am even anxious for him to hear it."

The commissary hesitated for an instant, then, without making any further objections, he said: "I come, sir, to fulfil a very painful duty, and I desire to perform it with all possible consideration for you. It was for this reason that I abstained from going upstairs. By calling you here, you see, I avoided unnecessary publicity; and I am sure you will not compel me to resort to measures which I should greatly dislike to employ."

"I don't understand you," rejoined Julien, drily.

"You will in a moment. I am the bearer of a warrant for your arrest, which the public prosecutor ordered me to serve about an hour ago."

"A warrant for my arrest!" exclaimed Julien. "Nonsense! You must be mistaken!"

"No, sir, I am not mistaken. Any error is quite out of the question. Your name is Julien-Louis-Charles de la Calprenède, and you live at No.

319, on the Boulevard Haussmann. I can show you the warrant. You will see that all the details are correct."

"It will be enough to tell me of what I am accused."

"I regret to tell you in your friend's presence, but as you insist—you are accused of theft."

"Theft!" repeated Julien, in profound consternation.

"But that's absurd!" exclaimed Jacques. "I beg your pardon, sir, I mean that this strange accusation is as great a surprise to Monsieur de la Calprenède as it is to me."

"At whose request am I arrested?" inquired Julien, in a husky voice.

"By virtue of a complaint made by Baron Matapan, the landlord of the house in which you reside."

"Ah, the wretch! No one else would be capable of such an infamous act! And what have I stolen from him, pray?"

"A very valuable necklace, composed of twenty-three opals surrounded by diamonds."

"Ah!" exclaimed Julien, "now I know the origin of this charge."

On hearing this unexpected remark, the Commissary of Police looked at the young man with an air of surprise, and Jacques de Courtaumer started. It seemed to him that Julien had just betrayed himself, and that he was indeed guilty.

"Now, sir," said the commissary, "I must ask you to accompany me to the Prefecture Dépôt."

"I shall not. Take me before a magistrate, if you like. He can question me, and I will reply. You have no right to treat me as a criminal. A man cannot be thrown into prison before he has been allowed an opportunity to exonerate himself."

"I am acting in obedience to orders, sir; and I would call your attention to the fact that such precautions are not unfrequently taken in such cases. The authorities must make sure of the person of the suspected party."

"A fig for your customs! I repeat that I shall not accompany you to the place you mention. I wish to see a magistrate."

"To-morrow you will be taken before one, who will hear what you have to say, and then decide what further steps shall be taken in the case; but I cannot postpone the execution of the warrant of which I am the bearer."

"I care nothing about your warrant," cried Julien, becoming more and more excited.

"Take care, sir; don't make matters worse by resistance," said the commissary, with commendable patience. "It is in your own interest that I advise you to accompany me quietly. If you are in a position to prove your innocence, what do you fear? One night is soon over, even in prison, and you will probably be released to-morrow. I scarcely need add that if you are set at liberty, no one will know that you have been arrested. With me, as with every police official, absolute secrecy is a professional duty. Besides, if you persist in your resistance, I shall be obliged to use forcible measures. Two of my subordinates are waiting for me at the door of the club-house. I have only to call them and order them to arrest you. But such a scandal would have a most deplorable effect. I appeal to this gentleman," added the commissary turning to Jacques, who had been a prey to the most conflicting emotions for some moments.

At first he had been indignant at this accusation against the son of his

aunt's most intimate friend ; then a strange suspicion had suddenly flashed through his mind. The imprudent words spoken by Julien seemed to throw a gleam of light upon the situation, and almost immediately he recollect ed that this debtor had unexpectedly settled all his numerous obligations with bank-notes, gained, as he pretended, at a clandestine roulette table. This story now seemed improbable in the extreme. Jacques foresaw that few persons would be likely to believe it, and might seek for the source of this sudden and most opportune change of fortune elsewhere. Jacques also thought the commissary was right in advising Julien to submit. It would be much better to go quietly to prison, than to engage in a futile struggle, which would certainly attract the attention of other members of the club. " My dear fellow," said the ex-lieutenant, " I am inclined to think that you waste your time in parleying with subordinates, who have received an order which they are compelled to execute. When I served in the navy, I was placed under arrest more than once, and the idea of resisting the person charged with my arrest never once occurred to me."

" This is a very different case," said Julien, angrily.

" It might be much worse ; Monsieur Bourleroy will be down soon, and you wouldn't care for him to see you in the custody of the police." Courtaumer had touched the right chord. Julien hung his head without making any attempt to answer this argument ; and Jacques, added : " You are evidently the victim of a mistake, which will be discovered tomorrow, and you will be set at liberty. I will promise you to inform your father, and call upon this Matapan, who accuses an honourable man so rashly. I don't know what grounds he may have for his suspicions, but I shall certainly have very little difficulty in convincing him that they are extremely absurd, and he will no doubt withdraw his complaint immediately."

" That wouldn't atone for the infamous act he has committed. He shall pay dearly for it."

" You can settle that account when you are at liberty, my dear fellow ; but if you will take my advice, we will start at once. This isn't the place for a discussion of this kind. Think of it ; the footman who summoned you may have already told his fellow servants, that a commissary of police was asking for you."

" I was sorry to be obliged to reveal my calling," said the kind-hearted official ; " but, unfortunately, my name alone would not have induced Monsieur de la Calprenède to see me, as he had no acquaintance with me—"

" That will do, sir," interrupted Julien. " You have a vehicle, I suppose."

" Yes, sir, and I was careful to station it some distance from the club-house. If you will kindly accompany me, we can enter it without attracting the slightest notice. My two assistants are in the street."

" You are mistaken. They are talking with the doorkeeper just now. That is the way you pretend to avoid scandal," said Julien ironically.

" I forbade them to show themselves, and if they have ventured to disobey me—"

" We are losing time," exclaimed Courtaumer. " Let us start, my dear fellow."

" Excuse me, sir," said the commissary, " you cannot accompany your friend. Our regulations forbid it."

"Very well; but you are not obliged to apply these rules in all their rigour. Allow me to tell you who I am—my name is Jacques de Courtaumer, I was formerly a lieutenant in the navy."

"Are you a relative of Monsieur de Courtaumer, the well-known investigating magistrate?"

"I am his brother, and I assure you that he will appreciate any favour you may show me and Monsieur de la Calprenède, who is the son of a particular friend of our family."

This little speech had its effect. "I cannot take the responsibility of leaving you alone with this gentleman," replied the commissary after a short pause, "but I will allow you to take a seat in the vehicle which is to convey us to the dépôt."

"That is all I ask," replied Courtaumer. It was not only to spare Julien the humiliation of departing alone with these policemen, that he desired to remain with him. He wished to ask him some questions, so that he might know what to think of the unfortunate youth's position.

They left the visitor's room, Calprenède going first, followed by the commissary, while Courtaumer brought up the rear.

The two detectives were no longer in the vestibule, and the doorkeeper did not emerge from his room to see the party pass by, a fact which seemed to indicate that he suspected nothing. In the street they met the two detectives. The commissary ordered one of them to take his seat on the box beside the coachman and dismissed the other. Julien naturally stepped in first, the commissary seated himself beside him, and Courtaumer took a place opposite. All this was done without attracting the attention of the passers-by. The vehicle started, and for about ten minutes no one spoke.

"Really, it seems to me that the demands of justice are exceedingly rigorous here in Paris," Courtaumer said at last. "I cannot understand why such imperative orders for your arrest should have been given. You are not a vagabond, you have a home, and there would have been no difficulty about finding you there to-morrow morning. An explanation of a quarter of an hour with M. Matapan would have settled everything."

"That is the very reason why the scoundrel did not desire it," said Julien, bitterly. "I met him this morning at the Café de la Paix where I was breakfasting. He approached the table where I was sitting, and I rose and left the restaurant. He could then have mentioned the robbery, but he took good care not to do so. He preferred to have me arrested, even if he were obliged to admit the injustice of his accusation afterwards."

"Doutrelaise did tell me that you were breakfasting with him when Monsieur Matapan entered the restaurant. Doutrelaise will mention that and aid me in circumventing your enemy, I am sure."

"Doutrelaise!" exclaimed Julien angrily. "Why he must be in league with my landlord. It was he who denounced me to Matapan."

"What can you mean, my dear fellow?" exclaimed Jacques. "Doutrelaise likes you; indeed, he is devoted to you."

"And yet he slanders me! I repeat that he alone could have furnished Monsieur Matapan with the information upon which this accusation is founded."

"You forget that Doutrelaise invited you to breakfast in order to lend you six thousand francs which you needed. It is not his fault if you no longer need the money, for he has been trying to find you all day. He

had no means of knowing that you were winning a much larger sum at the roulette table."

On hearing this last remark, the commissary pricked up his ears ; but it was not because roulette was a forbidden game that he listened so attentively.

"Besides, why should he wish to injure you ?" continued Courtaumer.

"I can't tell. Perhaps because I didn't encourage the pretensions he had the assurance to disclose to me."

"Pretensions ? You astonish me."

"He was inclined to undertake the defence of—a certain person whom he was bound to respect—he had no right to notice the foolish remarks made by Monsieur Bourleroy. I told him as much."

"You will never convince me that Doutrelaise was incensed by such a trifile. Besides, what can he have said to Matapan against you ?"

"Gentlemen," said the commissary forestalling Julien, who was about to reply, "I feel it my duty to warn you that if the magistrate asks me to repeat the conversation which took place in my presence, I shall be obliged to do so, even if it be likely to establish the guilt of the prisoner."

"I thank you for your warning, sir," said young Calprenède, quickly, "but I have nothing to conceal, and I wish my friend to know how Monsieur Doutrelaise has acted, and how it happens that I owe my arrest to him. The story won't be a long one, and I shall be perfectly willing to tell it in the presence of the magistrate who is to examine me."

"Good !" thought Jacques. "He is not afraid to explain, so he is innocent."

"But take care," insisted the commissary. "Magistrates are suspicious, and they have cause to be. When a prisoner repeats several times a story that exonerates him, they are strongly inclined to suspect him of having invented it for his defence."

"That's true," thought Jacques. "The idea did not occur to me, but I see the justice of it now. This poor fellow is, perhaps, going to recite a lesson learned by heart."

"I am telling, and I shall tell, nothing but the truth. So much the worse for those who refuse to believe me," said Julien.

"If he were guilty, he would not be so proud," again thought Courtaumer, this time a trifle reassured.

"And I declare that Doutrelaise's gossip has been the cause of all this trouble. This morning, at breakfast, he showed me an opal surrounded by diamonds, which he declared he had wrested from the grasp of a man whom he met on the staircase, in the dark, last night, and he also told me that this man had entered the apartment in which I live."

"Did he say this in Monsieur Matapan's presence ?" asked Jacques, greatly surprised.

"No ; Monsieur Matapan came in a little later ; I left as soon as he approached us. I don't know what was said afterwards, but the opal was lying on the table. Matapan must have seen it, and if a necklace of similar stones has really been stolen from him, he, of course, recognised the jewel. He probably asked Monsieur Doutrelaise how he came by it, and Doutrelaise repeated his story."

"But I don't understand how this can be. I was in the Champs-Elysées with Doutrelaise at one o'clock this afternoon, and he did not say a word about his nocturnal adventure, or his conversation with Monsieur Matapan.

"He probably did not feel inclined to boast about what he had done."

"I shall see him this evening, and will ask him to explain. But why should Monsieur Matapan have entered a complaint against you on such a slight foundation? Merely because the man who stole his necklace entered your rooms he concludes that you are the man? Why the thief probably had skeleton keys to open every door in the house, and he probably entered your apartment for the same purpose as he entered Matapan's—to steal anything of value that he could find."

"And this is not the first time that my room has been entered. I am satisfied that the same thing has happened several times already, and always at night time, though I have missed nothing."

"You must inform the magistrate who examines you of that, and you must tell him that you won to-day—how much was it?—eighteen thousand francs, I think."

"Yes, or thereabouts. The authorities won't take offence at that I suppose."

"No, but they might be astonished to find that you still had so much money in your possession after paying eleven thousand francs at the club."

"This gentleman is right," said the commissary, who had not lost a word of this dialogue. "It will be necessary for you to explain how you came into possession of any large amount, for persons might suppose that it came from a different source."

"What business is it of theirs, in any case?"

"Excuse me, but you will find it necessary to prove that the sum about you was not realised by selling the necklace stolen from Monsieur Matapan."

"On the contrary, the magistrate will have to prove that I have sold or pawned that necklace."

"What you say is true theoretically," replied the commissary, shaking his head; "but you will make a great mistake in not proving your innocence, if you have the means of doing so. And I advise you to begin by giving the address of the gaming establishment where you won eighteen thousand francs. It will be easy to verify your statement, and if it is found to be true, one grave charge that people will make against you will fall to the ground."

"The place is not licensed," replied Julien, "and I see no reason why I should denounce the person who keeps it."

"What!" exclaimed Courtaumer, "you would compromise yourself to avoid compromising an ex-croupier? Allow me to tell you that this would be folly."

"I will decide what I shall do when I am called before the magistrate," replied Julien, drily.

Jacques, incensed by this response, resolved to say no more. He was no longer fully convinced of Julien's innocence, and he thought of the probable consequences of this unfortunate affair with dismay. "My aunt will be horrified," he said to himself; "his father will die of grief, and his sister—Heaven only knows what will become of her! And poor Doutrelaise, who is so madly in love with the girl, he is in a nice fix now! It is true, though, that Monsieur de la Calprenède may look upon the match more favourably, for after such a catastrophe it won't be easy to find a husband for her."

The vehicle was rolling along very swiftly, and had already reached the Pont-Neuf, which is not far from the prefecture. Courtaumer felt that he had one more duty to perform in connection with his unfortunate companion.

" My dear fellow," he began, " you must now tell me what I can do for you. I must first inform your father, must I not ? "

" Just as you choose," replied Julien ; " there will be plenty of persons ready to do so if you dislike this painful duty."

" It would be much better for Monsieur de la Calprenède to learn the misfortune that has befallen you through me, and I know where to find him this evening. At this moment he must be at the house of my aunt, who is devoted to your family, and who may be of service to you, for she can see my brother, and ask him to speak to the magistrate entrusted with the investigation."

" I thank you, but—"

" We are approaching the prefecture, sir," the commissary interposed, addressing Jacques. " You had better alight now." And as he spoke, he pulled the bell, and the driver checked his horses.

The detective, who had been sitting on the box, now sprang down to open the door. Courtaumer, wounded by Julien's manner and language, bade him good-bye rather coldly, thanked the commissary, and alighted. " Ah ! " he murmured, as he stood watching the vehicle that was bearing young Calprenède away to prison, " the poor fellow is in a pitiable plight, from which he will never extricate himself, I fear. And to think that my aunt wished me to marry his sister ! "

VII.

ADRIEN, the elder of the Courtaumers, did not resemble his brother Jacques either in temperament or manner.

He seemed to have been created and placed on earth to perform the duties of a magistrate and family man, while Jacques seemed to have been born to rove the seas and shun every kind of tie. Nothing is more common than this striking contrast between two persons of the same family, and the phenomenon is probably due to *atavisme*, a doctrine greatly in vogue just now. Jacques represented the paternal side of the family. In former times all the Courtaumers had been soldiers. Adrien, however, strongly resembled his grandmother, the daughter of a prominent Breton judge, who possessed all the virtues and many of the faults peculiar to the old French magistracy. Adrien's was a cultivated, just, but by no means liberal mind, an honest nature, a truthful and firm character, with a slight tendency to systematic obstinacy and pessimism.

A stern magistrate, of irreproachable private life, Madame de Vervins' elder nephew was not a favourite by any means. His aunt esteemed him, but did not love him. His brother, although really fond of him, seldom sought his society. His colleagues feared him, even while they did ample justice to his merits.

He had married a wife sufficiently rich to insure his independence; a wife educated in accordance with the rigid principles of the old Parisian middle classes. Their opinions harmonised wonderfully, and they led a secluded life which suited them perfectly. Jacques rarely intruded into their peaceful home, and Madame de Vervins but moderately availed herself of the privileges to which she was entitled by reason of her near relationship: still, they were all on excellent terms. Adrien, who appreciated Jacques' good traits, forgave nearly all his faults, and he respected Madame de Vervins too much to find fault with her preferences or criticise

her opinions, although they differed widely from his upon almost all points. For instance, the marchioness was extremely desirous that he should tender his resignation in order not to serve the Republican government which she abhorred; but Adrien liked his profession too much to renounce it, not because he was ambitious, but because he had a genuine passion for the law. He displayed extraordinary zeal in discharging his duties, and his punctuality was proverbial at the Palais de Justice, for he not unfrequently reached his office in advance of his clerk, and sometimes remained long after his departure.

On the morning after his visit to Madame de Vervins, he did not deviate from his punctual habits. He even started for the office rather earlier than usual, as he was anxious to begin investigating the new case which had been intrusted to him. He only knew what one of his colleagues had told him, and what he himself had repeated to the marchioness, but he felt sure that it was an interesting case, and would furnish him with an opportunity to prove once more his remarkable talents as an investigator. His conversation with Madame de Vervins, and the Count de la Calprenède, had quieted all his scruples, and he was firmly resolved to discover the thief of the Boulevard Haussmann.

On entering his office, M. de Courtaumer found his clerk busy at work with some papers. This clerk was an eminently respectable man, thoroughly acquainted with his calling, and the magistrate did not disdain to talk with him or even to ask his advice occasionally. "Bohamont," he began, without any further preamble, "have you heard anything about a new case of robbery that has just been assigned to me."

"Yes, sir," replied the clerk, "the report is on your desk. I haven't yet examined it, but a commissary of police, whom I just met, told me he arrested the suspected party last night."

"That's singular. My colleague, Monsieur Brizardère, told me that the complaint was only filed at five o'clock, and that the proofs were exceedingly vague. I am surprised that the public prosecutor did not wait until I had looked into the affair. Is the commissary anywhere about here just now?"

"Yes, sir; he thought you would like to see him, and he is now awaiting your summons."

"Let me look over the papers first," muttered M. de Courtaumer, seating himself in his arm-chair. And he began to read half aloud, half to himself: "Hence, from the aforesaid testimony, it would appear that the said—"

Here he suddenly paused and literally bounded from his chair. The name he had not pronounced was that of Julien-Louis-Charles de la Calprenède. He read no further. The paper fell from his hand. The son of his aunt's most particular friend, arrested for theft! and he, Adrien de Courtaumer, appointed to examine him! It seemed indeed incredible.

He thought of his visit of the previous evening. He could still see the count sitting quietly near the mantel-piece in the drawing-room, and hear the marchioness say in a careless tone: "My dear nephew, you are certainly attaching undue importance to a very insignificant matter. What possible difference can it make to Monsieur de la Calprenède whether you or any other magistrate examine the inmates of the house in which he resides?"

Could they have been playing a part? But what could have been their object? That he could not divine. "No, it isn't possible!" he murmured.

"They would not have feigned ignorance of such a calamity. They knew nothing about it. If they had suspected that Julien was accused of the robbery, they would have told me. They had every interest in doing so, for I could, perhaps, have prevented the scandal of an arrest. But now that he is in prison I can do nothing. Had I been informed of the facts, even as late as this morning, I could have gone to my aunt to ask her advice again. Then there was still time to refuse the case; but now—Heaven only knows what my colleagues will say of me if I excuse myself."

"Besides, what pretext could I offer? I am not connected either by blood or marriage with the Calprenèdes. I know them but slightly and have no good reason to offer for excusing myself. If I ventured to plead Madame de Vervin's friendship for the father, people would say that I neglected my duty as a magistrate for the sake of my personal interests, for everybody knows that my aunt is very rich and that my brother and myself are her only heirs. I had better sacrifice my chance of an inheritance than do anything to arouse suspicions that would blight my professional career forever."

M. de Courtaumer hereupon rose abruptly, and, to the intense surprise of his clerk, who had never before seen his composure in the least ruffled, he began to pace up and down the room in great agitation. "Call the commissary," he said at last, turning to his clerk who left the room to repeat the order to the usher on duty.

It was scarcely necessary, for the commissary was waiting in the passage, in momentary expectation of the summons, and the door was scarcely opened when he entered the room of his own accord.

The magistrate noticed the commissary's air of embarrassment at once. "Can he already know of my acquaintance with the person he arrested?" Adrien said to himself, and he added aloud:

"I have sent for you, sir, to ask the particulars of the arrest you made last evening."

"I am here for the purpose of giving them, sir," replied the commissary. "I thought you would like to question me about the affair, although all the facts are narrated in my report, and I—"

"I have not yet examined the papers. I only glanced at the warrant, and saw the name of the accused."

"A very honourable name, unfortunately. But you desire the details. Yesterday evening, at about six o'clock, I received orders to arrest Monsieur Julien de la Calprenède. I went straight to his house, but did not find him there, and I continued my search in vain for a part of the evening, although the places frequented by the young man had been designated by the plaintiff."

"A Monsieur Matapan, I believe?"

"Yes, sir; the landlord of the house in which the Calprenède family resides. He also lives there, himself, and—"

"What was stolen?"

"A very valuable necklace, and he suspects the young man I arrested."

"Upon what facts does he base his accusation?"

"Well, sir, it seems that a certain Monsieur Doutrelaise, an inmate of the house, returned home shortly after midnight, and met a man on the staircase. A slight struggle ensued between them, in which one of the opals belonging to a necklace which the man held in his hand was separated from the others. This jewel remained in the possession of Monsieur

Doutrelaise, and on the following day he showed it to Monsieur Matapan, who at once recognised it."

"He identified it, then? And did Monsieur Doutrelaise recognise the culprit?"

"No, sir; the hall was not lighted, but he heard Monsieur de la Calprenède enter the suite of apartments occupied by the count, his father."

"But that is no proof."

"No, certainly not; but it is at least a strong presumption of his guilt."

"But if there was nothing more than this mere indication, it seems strange to me that the arrest of Monsieur de la Calprenède should have been so speedily ordered," said the magistrate, who began to think undue haste had been displayed. "Have you questioned the young man? What is your opinion?"

"I thought at first that he was innocent. He was not in the least troubled when I told him that I had come to arrest him, and he made no attempt to prove his innocence; he even tried to lord it over me. However, I changed my mind during the drive from the club to the dépôt, for I forgot to tell you, sir, that I arrested him at the club to which he belongs."

"The place was badly chosen," said M. de Courtaumer. "Monsieur de la Calprenède belongs to an honourable family, and you should have avoided any unnecessary publicity."

"There was none, sir; I sent for him to come to the visitors' parlour. He did so, and although he at first refused to follow me, he finally entered a vehicle that was awaiting me in the street, without making the slightest resistance."

"And during your drive you ceased to believe in his innocence? Why?"

"On account of certain remarks that he made. He pretended that he had won eighteen thousand francs at *roulette*. It struck me at once that he said this to explain why he was in possession of a large sum of money which he had about him. When he was searched, six thousand six hundred francs in bank-notes were found in his pockets, and he had just paid eleven thousand francs that he owed—that is five thousand to the treasury of his club, and six thousand to a gentleman who had won that amount from him at cards."

"And you think that this money—"

"Is the price of the necklace stolen from Monsieur Matapan. The young man hadn't a penny the evening before, and there was a talk of expelling him from the club on account of his indebtedness. The next day he scatters thousand franc-notes like chaff. Where did he obtain them? *Roulette* being a forbidden game, is only played in clandestine gambling establishments, and establishments of that kind, where a person gains large sums in a few hours, are rare. For my part, I don't believe the story. Besides, it is easy to verify it, for after at first refusing to designate the house where he had played, he finally consented to do so. I convinced him that it would be an important point in establishing his innocence, and then he gave me the address: No. 99 Rue du Rocher."

"You have been there, I suppose?"

"No, sir, not yet. This information was only given me by the accused at half-past eleven last night. Besides, I was waiting for orders from you. If this establishment is really in existence, it must be broken up, and that is an entirely different matter."

"What of that? You will go there at once and bring me the proprietors. I wish to hear their evidence to-day. Legal proceedings can be insti-

tuted against them afterwards, if we find they have been violating the law."

"Very well, sir, I will go at once. Allow me, however, before my departure, to inform you of another circumstance. When I saw the accused at the club he was accompanied by a friend."

"And you spoke of the arrest you were ordered to make in the presence of this friend?"

"I was obliged to do so, sir, in order to avoid a still greater scandal. Monsieur de la Calprenède would not have consented to remain alone with me, and to compel him to do so, I should have been obliged to ask the assistance of the officers who were waiting. Besides, I have no cause to repent having acted as I did, for the friend joined me in urging the young man to accompany me, and had it not been for his arguments I should certainly have failed in my efforts. So I did not think it at all out of the way to allow him to enter the vehicle that conveyed the prisoner to the dépôt."

"That was against the rules."

"I know it, but the gentleman told me that his name was Jacques de Courtaumer," replied the commissary, timidly.

"My brother!" exclaimed Adrien in surprise.

"Yes, sir. I did not then know you were to have charge of the case. I only learned it this morning, and came here expressly to inform you of a circumstance of which I thought you ought not to remain in ignorance."

"Thank you," stammered the magistrate, overwhelmed with consternation by this revelation.

He had been quite ignorant that his brother was on such friendly terms with Julien de la Calprenède, and he asked himself what course he ought to pursue, now that the commissary and his clerk knew that the prisoner he was to examine was his brother's friend. On reflection, he decided that this was still another reason why he should not draw back, for what would his subordinates think of him if he gave up the case now? "My brother belongs to the same club as Monsieur de la Calprenède," he remarked after a time, in a voice which had ceased to falter, "and he would, of course, show him this mark of interest; but he is not, and has never been, his friend."

"Oh, I could see that," replied the commissary. "Your brother only did what he was obliged to do for the unfortunate young fellow. Among people of the prisoner's rank, a certain observance of etiquette is absolutely necessary. But your brother's manner was only coldly polite, and it was evident that he was not at all sure of his companion's innocence."

"My brother's opinion does not concern or affect me, and I am going to question the accused immediately. Have him sent for, before you start for the Rue du Rocher for the man who keeps the gambling establishment there. I intend to hear him to-day, for his evidence will be of great importance. I shall also hear the plaintiff and Monsieur Doutrelaise. You will therefore warn these two witnesses, and bring them to me at the earliest possible moment."

The commissary bowed and then immediately left the room.

Adrien de Courtaumer had discharged his duty as a magistrate, and he intended to do so until the end. He was not obliged to wait long for the prisoner, whom he had decided to examine regardless of their mutual acquaintances. The Préfecture Dépôt adjoins the Palais de Justice, and persons have only to cross the courtyard of the Sainte-Chapelle to reach the offices of the examining magistrates. Thus a quarter of an hour had not

elapsèd after the commissary's departure, and M. de Courtaumer was still pacing up and down his room, when Julien de la Calprenède entered it, followed by a Paris guard.

The magistrate, who had not expected him so soon, stopped short, and then retreated towards his arm-chair. One must be seated to investigate a criminal case ; and Adrien de Courtaumer deemed it of primary importance to show Julien de la Calprenède that he was in the presence of a magistrate. However, Julien did not give him time to reach his arm-chair, but rushed towards him, with his eyes flashing and his cheeks crimson with excitement. "Ah ! it is you, sir," he exclaimed impetuously. "You know me, and yet you have me dragged here as if I were a thief !"

The magistrate, with unruffled composure, seated himself at his desk, and pointed to a chair ; whereupon Julien vehemently continued : "Was it by your orders that I was handcuffed to be brought from the prison to your office ?"

"No," replied M. de Courtaumer, calmly ; "it is a precaution generally adopted to prevent persons from escaping. The courtyard of the Sainte-Chapelle is a public thoroughfare—"

"And I might have there recognised some of my father's or the Marchioness de Vervins' friends. But I could not have told them that I was being taken before Monsieur de Courtaumer, for it had not occurred to me that you would conduct my examination."

"The case was assigned to me. I must do my duty, however painful it may be."

"Was it Madame de Vervins who advised you to accept it ?"

"I ask for no advice when a question of duty is involved," severely replied the magistrate, who was incensed by the tone and manner which the unfortunate young fellow had adopted. "You know the crime of which you are accused. Sit down and answer the questions I am going to put to you."

Julien spurned with his foot the chair generally used by prisoners, folded his arms, and scornfully rejoined : "Answer you ! I would perhaps consent to answer a magistrate who did not belong to the same rank and circle as myself, because I might feel that he would be impartial ; but what good would it do for me to reply to you ? It is evident that you think me guilty, for you would not expose yourself to the danger of subsequently meeting in some drawing-room, a man whom you had been obliged to release after doing all in your power to ruin him. You can question me, but you will learn nothing."

This language amazed M. de Courtaumer, who was prepared for anything but a point-blank refusal to reply. He did not know Julien de la Calprenède. He was entirely ignorant of his peculiar disposition, his at once proud and violent nature, which would brook no restraint of any kind. He did not know that Julien only obeyed his passions, and that at the age of twenty-two he had not a single friend whom he had not offended in some fit of anger. Any magistrate would naturally be inclined to consider such a refusal to defend oneself as a mere scheme on the prisoner's part, and so M. de Courtaumer regarded it. "I cannot compel you to speak," he said, coldly, "but I can compel you to listen to me. I will first read the charge that has been brought against you."

"That is quite unnecessary, I know it. I am accused of having stolen a necklace from Baron Matapan ; and this absurd accusation is founded upon the testimony of a certain Monsieur Doutrelaise."

" You will be brought face to face with them."

" Very well. I shall tell Monsieur Doutrelaise that he is a fool, and Monsieur Matapan that he is a scoundrel."

" You will not exonerate yourself by insulting them."

" I am not trying to exonerate myself. It is for you to prove that I am guilty."

" It is also my duty to tell you that you are adopting a very unwise course. I am also anxious to assure you that I have formed no unfavourable opinion of you. If you were calmer, you would already have become conscious that I am not acting as I have a right to act with you. I am not examining you, but merely talking with you; and my clerk, you see, is not taking down either my questions or your replies."

" I do not care in the least what he writes."

" I will also add that I have decided to allow the matter to rest for to-day. I wish to give you time for reflection. Two days hence, I will hear the witnesses I have summoned, and recall you. You must decide, in the meantime, whether you will persist in a course that cannot fail to injure your cause. For the present, I will confine myself to noting your refusal to reply. Pray give me your name and surname."

" You know them. It is not necessary for me to tell you."

" This is a mere form, you know—"

" But one to which I refuse to submit."

The magistrate could not repress a movement of impatience, but he abstained from insisting, and turning to his clerk, said : " State that the accused, having refused to reply to a single one of my questions, the examination is postponed for the present. You will afterwards make out the necessary papers."

" May I inquire what this last form means?" inquired Julien, ironically.

" You were only a suspected person. From this moment you are a prisoner."

" Judicial language seems to abound in charming distinctions. If you could only succeed in making me out a felon, your success would be complete, and your promotion would doubtless follow as a matter of course."

This was too much, and M. de Courtaumer's long-tried patience gave way. " Remove the prisoner," he said to the guard.

Julien replaced the hat which he had condescended to remove on entering the room, and turned his back on the magistrate with this insolent farewell : " Pray present my compliments to Madame de Vervins." Thereupon he went out with head erect and flashing eyes.

Adrien de Courtaumer sat in speechless bewilderment, and the worthy clerk was no less astonished. Never in his long career had he seen a man behave in such a manner in the presence of the magistrate who had summoned him for examination. " What do you think of this affair, Bohamont?" inquired Adrien.

" I think that criminals are not in the habit of displaying so much assurance," replied Bohamont at once.

" Then you believe the young man innocent?"

" Sir, I don't allow myself to form an opinion as yet."

" But don't you see that his audacity is only part of his plan of defence. He wishes to gain time. He flatters himself, perhaps, that the influence of his father, and his father's friends, will save him. He is mistaken, however. Where are the witnesses summoned to appear this morning in the other case I am investigating? Call them; I will examine the papers in

the Calprenède case after I have heard the report of the commissary sent to the Rue du Rocher."

The clerk obeyed, and Adrien devoted himself conscientiously to the investigation of an uninteresting crime: a quarrel between several intoxicated men, one of whom had been killed on emerging from a wine-shop. He listened to five or six scoundrels of the lowest order, and heard the scene described in as many different ways, from which he had to arrive at the truth by questioning the witnesses adroitly; in short, he discharged his by no means pleasant task in a most exemplary manner.

He had just concluded it, when the commissary returned. "I have to inform you, sir," he said, "that the person mentioned as the proprietor of the gambling-house in the Rue du Rocher disappeared this morning."

"What! disappeared?"

"He left for Spain by the first train. His name is Sam Martin, and he was formerly employed at Hombourg. I asked what he was doing in Paris, and the house porter declared that he did not keep a gambling saloon. I then searched the house, but could find none of the necessary implements for the game of *roulette*. It is true, however, that the man may have taken them away with him."

"It is very unfortunate that this visit was not paid last night. You had better telegraph, so that this fellow Martin can be arrested before he crosses the frontier."

"I shall not neglect to do so; but if you will allow me to express my opinion, I should say that the first thing to be done is to begin a search among the Paris jewellers, for I have no doubt but what the necklace has been sold. The story of the eighteen thousand francs won in a gambling saloon is a falsehood. Young Calprenède was undoubtedly acquainted with the ex-croupier, and knew that he intended to leave Paris, and that we would be unable to question him. So I am strongly inclined to think that the necklace has been sold. The eighteen thousand francs which the young man had in his possession yesterday is about the amount the ornament would bring in. Monsieur Matapan values it at from twenty-five to thirty thousand francs. The Mont de-Piété would not lend half that amount on it; a receiver of stolen goods would not have given ten thousand; and besides, to judge from the social position and antecedents of the accused party, it does not seem probable that he knows any of the persons to whom professional thieves resort under such circumstances."

"Certainly not," murmured M. de Courtaumer.

"That is very fortunate, for receivers of stolen goods always break up such ornaments, and send the jewels to foreign countries where they have correspondents; while an honest jeweller would probably keep such a necklace as this on account of its rarity, and so we shall find it without any difficulty. Monsieur Matapan expressly states that it could not be mistaken for any other, as he brought it from the Indies, where precious stones are mounted in a different style than in France."

The magistrate's head drooped. He felt that it was no longer possible to doubt Julien de la Calprenède's guilt. "Is anything known about the character of the plaintiff?" he inquired, merely to conceal his embarrassment, for he attached very slight importance to the question.

"I examined the records at the prefecture this morning, and found that Monsieur Matapan came to live in Paris about twelve years ago, and that he built the house on the Boulevard Haussmann, in which he now resides, shortly after his arrival. He is fifty-three years old, and unmarried. He

purchased the title of baron in Italy, and consequently has a right to bear it."

"Very well ; but where did he formerly reside ?"

"He came from Java, I believe, where he made quite a large fortune in trade. He began as a captain in the merchant service. However, he was born on the island of Mauritius, and so he is an English subject. He leads a very secluded life. He occasionally calls on his tenants, but entertains no company. There seems to be nothing against him. Two or three times he has absented himself from Paris for six or eight months. He probably has business interests that require attention in other countries ; but he has not left the city during the past three years."

"I shall know more about him after his examination," remarked M. de Courtamer, "and perhaps I will hear what he has to say, to-day. At all events, begin your search in the jewellery establishments immediately. If you succeed in finding the necklace, the affair can perhaps be settled. Monsieur Matapan will probably abandon the prosecution if restitution is made ; and this would be desirable, for the young man belongs to one of our most respected families. You say this necklace can be easily identified ?"

"Yes, sir, on account of the setting, and also on account of the jewels."

"Diamonds, I believe ?"

"No, sir ; that is to say, there are diamonds, and a large number of them, but they are all small stones, and form the setting of thirty-two opals. All these details are mentioned in the plaintiff's complaint."

"I have not yet read it. I meant to do so before questioning the accused, but as he refused to reply, I was obliged to send him back to the dépôt, as I had another case on hand. But did you say the jewels composing this necklace were opals ?"

"Yes, sir ; the largest and finest known, so Monsieur Matapan pretends."

"That is strange," murmured the magistrate, suddenly recollecting how only the evening before he had seen a necklace of opals, which had astonished him by their extraordinary size and brilliancy, lying on the tea-tray at his aunt's house. When the commissary had left the room, Adrien again seated himself at his desk, and began to examine the papers relating to the case. He was particularly interested in the minute description which M. Mapatan gave of the stolen article, and this description seemed to apply perfectly to the necklace which had sparkled on Madame de Vervins' tea-table the evening before. Who had taken it there ? The marchioness certainly had not stolen it, and if the count had been the thief he would not have shown the marchioness this proof of his infamy. "Good heavens !" thought M. de Courtamer, suddenly, "who knows but that unprincipled young fellow Julien has been trying to induce her to purchase it ? I recollect now that she told me it had been brought to her for inspection, and she seemed embarrassed. But, on the other hand, what was Monsieur de la Calprenède doing there ? Can she have sent for him to talk about his son's proposal ? And if that was really Monsieur Matapan's necklace, what has she done with it ? She evidently had no suspicion that it was stolen ; and if Matapan learns that it is in her possession, what will be the result ? I scarcely dare think of it !"

M. de Courtamer's usher brought these reflections to a sudden termination by entering with a card, which produced an extraordinary effect upon his master. "My aunt," muttered Adrien, "she here ! And she wishes to see me immediately. I have guessed the truth, then. She has come

to speak to me about the necklace. Bohamont," he added, turning hastily to his clerk, "I must receive one of my near relatives who has called to see me on business unconnected with the profession. Your presence might annoy her. Go and ask for the document that is missing in the case of Gavard and Merlon. I will call you when I need you."

The clerk was not ill-pleased to leave the room. He liked to smoke his pipe on the boulevard in front of the Palais de Justice, and he hoped to have time to enjoy this pleasant recreation. He quickly went out by the back door, just as Madame de Vervins was ushered in through the one used by the prisoners and witnesses. "A seat, my dear boy, and at once!" she exclaimed; "I am quite out of breath from climbing to your fourth floor. I am really unable to stand a moment longer."

"I assure you, aunt, that if I had known of your intended visit, I would have gone to meet you," stammered the magistrate, "and if the idea of sending for me had occurred to you—"

"And by whom? I didn't know where to find you, and if I hadn't met a young lawyer crossing the courtyard, I should have been lost a dozen times before getting here. He is a radical, I think, but he was certainly very polite. He escorted me to your very door. How long is it since magistrates have been perched up under the eaves? This arm-chair is hard enough, too! The government you serve does not treat you very well, my poor Adrien."

"But, aunt, a magistrate does not serve the government."

"Oh yes! I know what you are going to say. But I did not come here to talk politics. I came—but tell me, Adrien, are there any spies here? Haven't the walls ears?"

"No, aunt; we are quite alone. I sent away my clerk a moment ago, and no one can hear us."

"Then I will proceed to business. You can probably guess what I have on my mind."

"You came to see me about Julien de la Calprenède, I suppose."

"You are right."

"When I called on you last evening to inquire if I should accept the investigation of a case of robbery committed in the house where Julien lived, I was not aware, I assure you, that this unfortunate young man was regarded with suspicion."

"But I knew it," replied Madame de Vervins, quietly.

"You knew it! and you concealed it from me?"

"Yes. If I had told you, you would have excused yourself, and I did not wish you to do that; I would rather my friend's son had to deal with you than with any other judge."

"But, aunt, I shall be obliged to do my duty as strictly as any of my colleagues."

"Your duty, your duty, you are always prating about duty. Haven't you your duties as a gentleman and a nephew, as well?"

Adrien started and frowned. He was, first of all, a magistrate, and Madame de Vervins had wounded him deeply. "My dear aunt," he said, after a moment's silence, "I entertain the most profound respect and affection for you, and I sincerely deplore the misfortune that has overtaken your friend Monsieur de la Calprenède; but if his son is guilty, I must treat him as he deserves."

"There you are on your high horse again! But listen to me quietly, instead of exciting yourself so unnecessarily. I admit that it is your duty to

be impartial ; but you will also admit that you are not forbidden to show kindness to one who is accused."

"Kindness is a word that is capable of many interpretations ; and if you mean that I am to conduct the investigation in such a way as to make it result in the exoneration of the prisoner—"

"What a terrible stickler you are, my poor Adrien. I shall not attempt to argue with you, and leaving generalities, will simply ask what has been done in this affair ?"

"Young Julien has been arrested, as you have probably heard ere this."

"Yes, so your brother informed me. He accompanied Julien to prison."

"And he gave his name to the commissary ; he might have avoided compromising himself like that."

"You mean compromising *you*. Jacques isn't afraid of anything, and he doesn't lack the necessary courage to defend his friends when they are assailed."

"So he is a friend of this Julien's !" said the judge bitterly.

"No, but he is aware that Julien's father is my friend, and he doesn't desert people when misfortune overtakes them. But let's say no more on this subject. When do you mean to examine young Calprenède ?"

"I have already done so, or rather I tried to, but he refused to reply ; and his tone and manner were so offensive that I was obliged to send him back to the dépôt."

"So he was haughty and indignant ? I'm glad to hear that. Not that I approve it, but it convinces me that he is innocent."

"I regret to say, aunt, that I don't agree with you, and that I believe he is guilty of the crime of which he stands accused."

"Upon what facts do you base this opinion ? Have you any proofs ?"

"Not yet. I have scarcely had time to look into the affair, but appearances are certainly against him, for, within the period of two years, he has squandered the entire fortune he inherited from his mother."

"A fine reason, that ! Your brother Jacques has devoted rather more time to the task, but he will soon arrive at a like result. Do you think *him* capable of theft ?"

"Julien leads a very dissipated life. He gambles—"

"So does Jacques."

"Julien is deeply in debt, or rather he was, for he paid all his creditors yesterday, and people very naturally wonder where he obtained the money."

"What explanation has he given ?"

"He pretends that he won the money at a gaming establishment, the address of which he gave. I sent a Commissary of Police there, who states that the man designated as the proprietor of the place disappeared this morning. This, as you must admit, happened most opportunely to prevent me from verifying the truth of the prisoner's statement."

"I will admit it, if you like, as I wish to pass on to another subject. Do you know what was stolen from this man, Matapan ?"

The question reminded the magistrate of what he had seen the evening before in his aunt's drawing-room and greatly disconcerted him. "Yes, aunt," he replied, in considerable embarrassment. "I learnt it an hour ago. It was a necklace composed of opals surrounded by diamonds."

"And you suppose that Julien sold this necklace to obtain some money ?"

"I suppose nothing," stammered M. de Courtaumer. "I have ordered a search to be made in the various jewellery establishments of Paris."

"That was useless, for the necklace will not be found there."

"Why?" timidly inquired Adrien, who dreaded to hear the truth.

"Because the necklace hasn't been sold."

"How do you know that, aunt?"

"Why, because I am perfectly sure I have not purchased it, and because I have it," the marchioness continued, quietly.

"You have it?"

"Yes. I showed it to you last night, and I have it with me now."

As she spoke, Madame de Vervins opened a small leather case she had in her hand, took the necklace from it, and threw the ornament scornfully upon the magistrate's desk.

It was a scene for an artist. M. de Courtaumer, as pale as death, gazing with an air of consternation at the opals sparkling on his papers, and his aunt closing her case with unruffled calmness, formed a tableau seldom seen in the office of an investigating magistrate. "Well, do you think that the boy has sold Monsieur Matapan's necklace now?" smilingly inquired the marchioness. "He has not sold it, that is evident," stammered Adrien, "but—"

"But he must have taken it, as I bring it to you—that is, unless you suspect me of having been the thief."

"He certainly must have brought it to you."

"No; it was his father who brought it to me last evening, and he found it yesterday morning in the study that separates his bed-chamber from Julien's room."

"That is sufficient proof of the unfortunate young fellow's guilt."

"I don't think so. If Julien had stolen the necklace, it would have been to profit by the theft. He wouldn't have left it in an article of furniture which anybody might open, for the key was in it. And even supposing he had been guilty of such incomprehensible folly, he would certainly have returned for the necklace; but he went out very early, and was absent the entire day. His father, who was searching for him everywhere, hoped that he would return last night; but poor Julien was unable to do so, as he was spending the night in prison."

"But how could this necklace have found its way into Monsieur de la Calprenède's apartment? Some one must certainly have concealed it there."

"It certainly did not get there unaided. Who put it there? That is a mystery I intend to solve."

"And which must be solved at any cost, for if it was not Julien—"

"It was his father or sister, you mean. Well, Calprenède is terribly embarrassed financially, but he would not commit a dishonourable act to save himself from starving. Besides, didn't I tell you just now that he came to me expressly to explain the situation and ask my advice? As for my dear Arlette—"

"No one would think of suspecting her, but the count has servants—"

"Two honest girls incapable of taking a penny that doesn't belong to them. Besides, what difference does all this make? Monsieur Matapan's opals have been found, so the affair is virtually ended."

"You are mistaken, aunt," quickly replied the magistrate. "A theft has been committed, and the restitution of the stolen article will not stay the prosecution. The law is clear on that point."

"I don't assert the contrary; but it could scarcely be applied in all its rigour."

"That is not for me to say."

" If I am not mistaken, you have the right to decide whether any further action shall be taken in the matter."

" And you think I can conscientiously say that proceedings in the present case should be abandoned?"

" Why not? You have only to return the necklace to Monsieur Matapan, and ask him to withdraw his complaint."

" I return the necklace? How can you propose such a thing? I won't touch it. It would burn my fingers. And how should I explain my possession of it?"

" You need offer no explanation. You need only say: 'It was sent to me; here it is. Take it, and say no more about it. The investigation is ended.'"

" Really, you have a strange idea of a magistrate's duties, aunt. How can you suppose the owner will be satisfied with such an explanation? He will ask me where I obtained the necklace; and if I tell him you gave it to me, you will be mixed up in the case, and questioned. If you, in your turn, are compelled to state the source from which it came, the admission that Monsieur de la Calprenède gave it to you, will be equivalent to a confession that his son is guilty. I assure you I would rather send in my resignation than do what you ask."

" Upon my word! my dear boy, that wouldn't be a bad idea to resign. I have been advising it for a year, and many of your colleagues have set you the example. But I know that your wife is not of the same opinion, and you are free, of course, to do as you like. All I ask is that you will assist me in extricating my friend Calprenède from the trying position in which he is placed. Return this gewgaw to its owner, and—"

" I shall not do that, aunt, and I beg you will take it back at once."

" I? Never! I have had enough of those wretched jewels. They shall never enter my house again. And by-the-way, I shall probably surprise you very much when I tell you that I have seen them somewhere before. I had an old uncle who held an official position in Malta before the Revolution, and who was a collector of antique jewels. I believe I saw this necklace in his possession. Who knows but what it was stolen from him?"

" Not by Monsieur Matapan, certainly. He is only fifty, and my great-uncle died in 1824, I believe."

" Oh, I'm not accusing your friend Matapan; but he had better not accuse Julien de la Calprenède. All that is necessary is to induce him to desist, and I depend upon you to effect this. And now I am going," added Madame de Vervins, rising abruptly.

" I won't detain you, aunt, for I am expecting some witnesses; but for Heaven's sake, take this necklace with you."

" Not I! It is safe here, and I am going to leave it."

" Don't you understand that you are placing me between two most disagreeable alternatives: either to confess that you have served as a thief's intermediary, or to lie."

" But even if I did consent to take the necklace away with me, your position would be precisely the same. You have seen it, and you would still know where it is. Can you continue the investigation of this affair as if you knew no more than you did an hour ago? Come, return the necklace, and persuade Matapan to let the prosecution drop. That will end the matter. I shall be most grateful to you, and you will have no cause to reproach yourself, for Julien de la Calprenède is not, cannot be a thief. The necklace was found in his room, it is true, but some day you will

ascertain that it was placed there by some one for the purpose of ruining him, and breaking his father's and sister's hearts."

The marchioness was still talking when the usher cautiously entered the room, and whispered a few words to M. de Courtaumer, who curtly replied : "Let him wait."

"Who is it?" inquired Madame de Vervins.

"Monsieur Matapan is here. I am about to hear his testimony."

"Very well. I will leave you, then. His coming is most opportune, but I have no desire to meet him. Are there two doors to your office?"

"Yes, aunt, I will show you the way down ; but I entreat you once more not to ruin my professional career."

"I don't ask you to do anything of the kind. What do you mean?"

"If you insist upon my complying with your request, I swear to you that I shall resign my position."

The marchioness hesitated for a moment, but after reflecting, she replied : "My dear Adrien, I am really very sorry, since you are so foolish as to care for your office, but I cannot help it. You will obey the dictates of your conscience, and I am sure you will act wisely. I must add that Count de la Calprenède is quite unaware that I have appealed to you, and the son knows nothing about it. He does not even know that his father has found the necklace. Now, you understand the exact situation. Open the door for me."

Adrien bowed and conducted Madame de Vervins to the corridor, pointed out the staircase, and left her without adding a single word. This was true heroism, for his mind was made up. He had decided to submit, that is to say, to obey his aunt and resign his office. But a single chance of reconciling his magisterial scruples and his duties as a relative remained. If M. Matapan, after regaining possession of his property, would consent to drop the prosecution, and promise to remain silent respecting the mode of restitution, he, Courtaumer, could, without compromising himself, send in a report of not guilty. And as Adrien wished to conclude the matter before his clerk returned, he went in person to open the door for M. Matapan, who was waiting in another passage. He had never seen the baron, but he recognised him at once, for all the other persons in waiting were shabbily dressed, and had been summoned to appear in other cases. Matapan alone had the air of a gentleman. Adrien de Courtaumer asked him his name for form's sake, and then invited him to enter.

M. Matapan did not even suspect that he was going to have a contest with the magistrate who had summoned him to give his testimony in an exceedingly delicate matter ; and he entered the room very well satisfied with himself and with his case. He expected to be received with the deference due to a baron, landowner, and millionaire. He also expected to converse with the magistrate in a familiar way, to conclusively prove Julien de la Calprenède's guilt in a few words, and bear away with him the agreeable assurance of a conviction which would avenge the insult he had received from the culprit's father. He knew Jacques de Courtaumer, and thought it quite possible that he might be related to the magistrate ; but he did not know that he was his brother, and he was also ignorant of the fact that these gentlemen had an aunt who was the count's most particular friend.

He entered, therefore, with his head erect and a smile upon his lips, and yet he failed to produce a favourable impression. His lordly airs displeased the sagacious Adrien, who instantly conceived a rather uncomplimentary

opinion of him, and gave him a correspondingly cold reception. M. Matapan was not disconcerted by such a trifle, however. He bowed slightly and only barely escaped sitting down before he was invited to do so.

"Be seated, sir," said M. de Courtaumer, pointing to a chair, and installing himself in his arm-chair to mark the distinction between them. Before admitting the witness, the magistrate had had the presence of mind to lock up the opal necklace in a drawer of his desk. "I believe, sir," he began coldly, "that you have received a summons—"

"Only a short time ago," interrupted Matapan, "and you see I did not lose a moment in obeying it."

"My clerk is out," resumed the magistrate. "I will hear your deposition as soon as he returns. In the meantime I have a word to say to you respecting the complaint you made yesterday."

"I should like nothing better. It is much more satisfactory to discuss such subjects informally. Legal terms and forms only serve to complicate these matters."

"Perhaps I shall be obliged to adopt the usual method finally; but first of all tell me if you have any other evidence against the prisoner Calprenède than what is given in your complaint?"

"No; but upon my word! it seems to me that it is quite sufficient." M. Matapan uttered this response in a careless tone. He was well satisfied with the beginning of the interview. Those words: "the prisoner, Calprenède," sounded very pleasantly in his ears.

"It seems to *me* rather vague," the magistrate said, coldly.

"What! Why, Monsieur Doutrelaise saw the thief unlock the door of the apartment on the second floor: and before he saw this, he had wrested one of the opals of my necklace from this person's hand. He showed it to me, and I recognized it instantly."

"I will hear what this witness, Doutrelaise, has to say; but if he adds nothing to the facts you have just mentioned, I am compelled to warn you that they are by no means conclusive. Others than the prisoner might have entered Monsieur de la Calprenède's apartment."

"Undoubtedly. In the first place, there is the count himself, and then, the two servant girls who are in his employ. I don't speak of his daughter, for I don't suppose she wanders about the staircase in the dark. But the son leads a very dissipated life, and as his father hasn't a penny, he borrows of everybody. He owes me four thousand francs. He committed this robbery to pay his debts."

"Then he has been very stupid. To rob a creditor in order to pay him, would be the height of folly. You would be sure to ask yourself if the money he had repaid you hadn't some mysterious connection with the robbery of which you had been the victim."

"Bah! he thought I should not discover the loss of my necklace for some time. As I have already remarked, I merely learned the truth by chance. The necklace is usually locked up in my safe with my other valuables. I don't take it out three times a year. However, I did so on the preceding day in order to show it to one of my friends, and I left it in an open drawer."

"An excellent reason why the prisoner should imagine you would think of it the next day."

"Ah! so you are defending him, then! The lawyer who pleads his cause will talk in the very same way as you."

" And you, sir, forget you are speaking to a magistrate," retorted Adrien, curtly.

" Excuse me, but you told me that we were to talk together informally. The moment you become a magistrate again everything is changed. I will wait until your clerk returns before answering."

Adrien bit his lip. He saw too late that he had made a mistake in rebuking Matapan, richly as the latter deserved it. That was not the way to induce him to consent to the compromise which Madame de Vervins desired. " I thought it only right, sir," he rejoined, " to mention one of the arguments that the counsel for the defence will present if this case should come before the Assizes. There are others which I will not refer to, but which will certainly produce a great effect upon the jurors, and make it extremely difficult to secure the prisoner's conviction. Consequently, it is now for you to decide whether you really care to prosecute this suit to the end. You certainly can have no grudge against a respectable family that would have great cause to deplore such a scandal."

" Oh, not the slightest," replied M. Matapan, shrugging his shoulders. " These people have been tenants of mine during several years. I don't visit them because I have no great fondness for the nobility in general; but I have no cause whatever to complain of them. If they had annoyed me in any way, I should have given them notice to quit; but I have let them remain, though I feel some uneasiness about the next payment of my rent. However, I have suffered a serious loss. The article stolen from me is worth at least thirty thousand francs, to say nothing of its value artistically. There is no necklace in Europe like it, and I am very anxious to recover it. An investigation may enable us to discover what has become of it; but if I do not succeed in finding it, I shall at least have the satisfaction of knowing that the scoundrel who took it will be punished."

" Granted; but what if it should be returned to you?"

" That would change the aspect of affairs entirely. But, unfortunately, it will not be returned. It may, perhaps, be found at the pawnbroker's or at some jeweller's, but in that case I shall be obliged to pay a large sum to redeem or re-purchase it, and the father, who has lost everything, will never repay me."

" But if you could regain possession of it without any outlay, would you withdraw your complaint?"

M. Matapan reflected, looking at the magistrate as if trying to read his thoughts and discover his motive in asking this question. " I might perhaps withdraw it," he replied, " but it would depend entirely on circumstances. If, for instance, these Calprenèdes would confess that the theft had been committed by one of the members of their family, and if, after this confession, they entreated me not to ruin the heir to the title—well, in that case, as I don't desire the death of the sinner—I would be magnanimous, I think."

" There is no probability of such an avowal. The prisoner has made no confession, and I don't think he will. My supposititious case was entirely different—one of anonymous restitution, for example; a case in which the thief, who is a prey to remorse, returns the necklace."

" Such things never happen. I don't believe in remorse; I only believe in interest. No one ever makes restitution unless it is to his interest to do so. But that wouldn't matter, provided it was returned. I should be delighted to regain possession of my necklace, I assure you."

" Then, if some one offered to return it to you on condition that you would allow the investigation to drop, would you accept the offer?"

"I don't say no, but if I allowed the investigation to drop before I obtained my opals, I should run a great risk of never seeing them again."

"Of course the restitution would precede the withdrawal of your complaint."

"But how can an arrangement of this kind be effected? I fancy that the law would not sanction any such compromise."

"Justice might sanction it, as there would be no necessity of continuing the suit if the complaint was withdrawn."

"You present the affair in a new light," murmured Matapan, with feigned hesitation. "I am not an unfeeling wretch by any means. What do I ask, after all? Only to recover my own property—"

Adrien de Courtaumer eagerly seized his opportunity. "That assurance suffices, sir," he exclaimed. "Here is your necklace. Will you identify it?" And as he spoke, he opened a drawer, took out the necklace, and handed it to M. Matapan.

"This is indeed my necklace," cried the baron, after examining it closely. His face brightened, his eyes sparkled, and the hands that held the opals trembled visibly.

Was it joy at the recovery of a family heirloom that produced this extraordinary emotion? M. de Courtaumer believed so. "Now, sir," said he, "the affair is ended. You have only to write out a formal announcement of the withdrawal of your complaint. You will find all the necessary writing materials on my clerk's desk. Address your letter to the public prosecutor, and I will attend to the rest."

"By that, you mean the release of the prisoner, do you not?" inquired M. Matapan, looking anything but pleased.

"The complaint being withdrawn, and the evidence not of a nature to render an investigation necessary, I shall send in a report stating that the charge is not sustained. The prisoner's release will follow, as a matter of course."

"And this interesting young man will be restored to the bosom of his noble family?" said the baron, with almost threatening irony. "He will get off with spending a night in a cell—an amusing adventure to relate to his companions at a midnight supper. His escapade hasn't cost him dear by any means."

"There is nothing to prove that he did steal the necklace from you," quickly rejoined M. de Courtaumer.

"On the contrary, there is everything to prove it. You have only to look at the necklace. An opal is missing from it; the same one that Monsieur Doutrelaise wrenched off in his encounter with the prisoner Calprenède."

"Or with some other person."

"Was it some other person who intrusted this necklace to you? Name the person, so that I can thank him as he deserves."

"I have nothing to say to you on that subject."

"Not to me, perhaps, but how about those who have a right to question you? You will be obliged to give an account to magistrates superior to you in rank."

"I am only accountable to my conscience."

"Mine would certainly reproach me severely if I insured a criminal's pardon and safety through a feeling of mistaken kindness."

"Which means that you intend to persist in your charge, I suppose," remarked M. de Courtaumer, turning pale.

" Exactly."

" But you just now promised to withdraw it."

" That I absolutely deny. You have been asking me all sorts of crafty questions, and I have answered with words that meant nothing. I wished to discover what you were aiming at, so I pretended to adopt your opinions. But I promised you nothing. You are mistaken about that—unfortunately for you."

" This language, sir—"

" Oh, you had better not lose your temper, you will be sorry for it, if you do. If you go too far, I shall have an interview with your superiors, and ask them what they think of a magistrate who, to save a guilty prisoner from punishment, offers to return to the plaintiff the article stolen from him, on conditions that he will refrain from prosecuting the thief. I am curious to know what these gentlemen will think of the bargain you have tried to make with me—for it was a bargain—my necklace against the liberty of a young scoundrel, in whose escape you are interested, though I don't know why. What would you have done with this necklace if I had absolutely refused to drop the prosecution, instead of intentionally misleading you by my answers? Did you intend to keep it, knowing all the while that it belonged to me?"

Adrien de Courtaumer was pale with anger, but he restrained his wrath, and had sufficient self-control not to interrupt M. Matapan. He wished to know how far the baron would dare to go. " Whatever your answer might have been, sir," he coldly remarked, " I should have returned this necklace to you. You know that very well, and no one will doubt it for a moment, even if you relate what has passed between us. You are quite at liberty to persist in your charge; I am equally at liberty to set such value upon it as I think proper, and to decide as my sense of right may dictate."

" That is true; but I defy you now to state that there are no just grounds for supposing the prisoner guilty of the crime with which he is charged. It was his father, or one of his relatives who returned the stolen article, and it would almost seem as if you were in league with them."

This time M. de Courtaumer's patience deserted him, and he was in danger of forgetting that he was a magistrate, when his clerk fortunately entered by the rear door. The appearance of this placid subordinate instantly calmed Adrien and put an end to the baron's insolence. M. de Courtaumer took advantage of the diversion to terminate the interview, and also to take some precautions against the dishonesty of his unscrupulous adversary. " I don't doubt, sir," he said, again turning to the baron, " but what this necklace belongs to you, but you must understand that I cannot restore it until the fact has been proved. It must be deposited at the clerk's office, and it is there that you will be obliged to identify it. Will you return it to me?"

Matapan hesitated. Before relinquishing his precious opals, he was anxious to ascertain if the magistrate had been really authorised to return them to him. " Is this gentleman your clerk?" he inquired, pointing to Bohamont, who was already engaged in mending his pen.

" Yes," replied M. de Courtaumer; " but to-day he has only to record the deposit of the stolen article, a deposit which will be made immediately. To-morrow you will undoubtedly receive another summons—next time as a witness. Now you may retire."

Matapan saw that it would be useless to insist any further. The clerk had seen the necklace, and had heard the magistrate say that this necklace

was the one which had been stolen. M. de Courtaumer had even added that the investigation would be resumed the next day; so he certainly had no intention of reporting that there was nothing to sustain the charge against the prisoner. "Here is the necklace, sir," replied the baron, at last. "I am at your service whenever it may please you to give me a hearing. I have the honour to bid you good-morning." Thereupon he laid the necklace on the desk, and left the room without another word. He had said his say, and he departed triumphant. To regain possession of his jewels, and to take away with him the assurance that the name of Calprenède would be covered with ignominy, was far more than he had dared to hope.

Adrien de Courtaumer was cheered by no such feeling of triumph. He had been defeated, ignominiously defeated, in his conflict with the baron, and he made no attempt to deceive himself. The unfortunate young fellow whom he had desired to save out of regard for Madame de Vervins, was not only lost beyond redemption, but he, the blameless, irreproachable magistrate, had placed himself in a hopeless dilemma by his generosity. He would neither tell a falsehood, nor betray his aunt's secret; so there was nothing for him to do now but abandon the case. Nor would that satisfy his sensitive conscience. He said to himself that he was the representative of justice, and that if he did his duty conscientiously and fully, he would be obliged, even if he resigned, to expose all who had served as intermediaries in this unfortunate attempt at restitution.

"Bohamont," he abruptly remarked to the clerk who was darting furtive glances at the necklace, "you can send away any other witnesses who may present themselves. I am going out now."

"Shall I tell them to call to-morrow?" inquired the worthy man, greatly astonished.

"No; you will wait for my successor's orders."

"What! sir, you are going to abandon the case."

"I am going to resign my office altogether. Take this necklace and accompany me to the office where I am going to deposit it. The usher can send away any witnesses who call."

Bohamont was completely bewildered, but he obeyed without venturing any further remarks. He picked up M. Matapan's opals with a timid hand, wrapped them carefully in a copy of the *Gazette des Tribunaux*, and waited in silence. M. de Courtaumer had seated himself at his desk, where he was writing a letter, which read as follows. "MY DEAR AUNT:—The accuser of your friend's son refuses to withdraw his charge even if the stolen property is restored to him. I have done what you desired, and can do no more. The only thing left for me now is to resign my position. The keeper of the seals will receive my resignation to-morrow. It shall never be said that a Courtaumer failed to do his duty. I hope that this sacrifice will prove of advantage to the unfortunate young man in whom you take so deep an interest, and I need not assure you that I remain ever your devoted and respectful nephew." He signed this with a firm hand, sealed and addressed it, and then rose and told his clerk to follow him.

But it was not without a pang of regret that he left the office he would never enter again. It seemed to him that his life was ended. In his secret heart he bitterly anathematised Julien de la Calprenède; and he did not even take away with him the consolation of being able to tell himself that his resignation would save his aunt from a bitter disappointment, for he

knew only too well that all his colleagues would understand why he had tendered it.

VIII.

THAT same morning Albert Doutrelaise, who, the night before, had gone to bed almost reassured respecting the fate of Arlette's brother, was apprised scarcely an hour after waking up, of the sad news of his arrest. He had spent the previous day and most of the evening in looking for Julien, and, as usually happens in such cases, he had looked everywhere save in the place where he would have found him. He had reached the club half an hour after Julien left it, and had there learned two things: first, that Julien had insulted Anatole Bourleroy; and secondly, that he had gone off with Jacques de Courtaumer. The news of the commissary's visit had not yet been made public, being only known to the servants, who were remarkably discreet. The information Doutrelaise received was thus of a nature to allay his fears. He said to himself that Julien must have a quiet conscience since he had made a public scene with one of his creditors, and that Jacques must certainly have given him good advice. Doutrelaise's uneasiness about young Calprenède had been chiefly caused by the young fellow's strange conduct during their breakfast at the Café de la Paix, and was consequently extremely vague. M. Matapan had not said anything very definite when he saw the opal on the table. His manner and language were of a nature to excite suspicion, it is true, but for all that, Doutrelaise could only indulge in conjectures, for the baron had certainly not said that the jewel belonged to him. Albert could not go to the Count de la Calprenède and ask him what had become of his son. At no time would he have ventured to take such a step; and the manner in which the old nobleman had turned his back upon him in the Champs-Elysées, was not calculated to encourage such an attempt on his part now. Accordingly he had decided to defer his desired explanation with Julien until the following day, resolving to send a message in the morning, requesting him to call; and he went home early so as to have plenty of time for reflection rather than sleep.

He spent the night in dreaming and contemplating the light in Arlette's window, which was not extinguished until very late. The count returned home before midnight, and he talked for a long time with his daughter, but Julien did not come home at all, for no light was visible in his room during the night.

At nine A.M., Doutrelaise was just completing his toilet, when Jacques de Courtaumer burst into his room like a bombshell. A glance at his visitor's face satisfied Albert that he was not the bearer of good news, and the first question he asked was: "Did you see Julien de la Calprenède last evening?"

"I saw only too much of him," replied Jacques, shrugging his shoulders.
"Do you know that he is in prison?"

"In prison! Impossible?"

"It is so possible that I accompanied him there—at least to the door. He was arrested at the club, and, as I happened to be with him at the time, I did not like to desert him."

"You were very kind."

"Oh, I'm none the worse for it. I wished to learn the facts of the case, and now I know them. There is no hope whatever for the young fellow."

He has fallen into the water, and I sha'n't undertake to fish him out. The task would be too difficult—besides, it has no attractions for me."

"What is he accused of?" inquired Doutrelaise, greatly excited.

"Of having stolen an opal necklace from Baron Matapan. By the way, that gentleman strikes me as being more like an adventurer than a baron. I haven't much confidence in a man who collects jewels and is acquainted with Chinese pirates. But the necklace has unquestionably been stolen from him, and he has entered a complaint, as he has a perfect right to do."

"And Julien has been arrested on this charge! What evidence is there against him?"

"You ask me that! Why, you furnished it. You told Matapan that you had a tussle on the stairs in the dark, with a man who was wandering about with a necklace in his hand, that you wrested an opal from him, and that you afterwards heard the man enter the count's apartments. Is it true, yes or no, that you told the baron this story? He even declares that you showed him the jewel."

"Yes, it is true."

"Then, to speak frankly, I am surprised that you did not display more discretion. Why should you, who are so madly in love with Mademoiselle de la Calprenède, tell Monsieur Matapan about a nocturnal adventure which so gravely compromises this young girl's brother?"

"I did not know that the opal belonged to him—I did not show it to him—he recognised it on the table where I had laid it while talking with Julien. As luck would have it, he entered at the very moment I—"

"No matter; but you must allow me to tell you that you have acted like a simpleton. Nor shall I conceal the fact that you have made an enemy of Julien. He considers you to be the cause of his misfortunes."

"He misjudges me like that!" exclaimed Doutrelaise, sadly.

"Oh, you needn't be inconsolable. Julien is no longer numbered among honest men. But you will be compelled to repeat the story of your adventure, and even to swear to it; for you will certainly be summoned as a witness."

"I shall refuse to testify."

"That would make matters even worse. Your refusal would alone furnish sufficient grounds for Julien's conviction. People would at once say that you were in league with him. However, you won't have to deal with a harsh judge, for my brother Adrien is investigating the affair."

"Your brother? Really, that's fortunate. You can see him before he examines Julien, and tell him there is some mistake, that Julien isn't guilty although appearances may be against him."

"I shall take good care not to do anything so foolish. You don't know my brother. He is a positive fanatic as regards his profession; besides, nothing would be so likely to prejudice him against a man as for me to praise him. However, Monsieur de la Calprenède will have a much better advocate, my aunt, whose wishes are entitled to consideration for many reasons. My brother and I are her heirs."

"Madame de Vervins! But, how can she have heard of the charge against Julien so soon?"

"It was I who told her. I had promised to take tea with her last evening, but did not go for the very good reason that young Calprenède requested me to accompany him to the dépôt. After this delightful expedition, I returned to the club, and was greatly surprised to learn that my aunt had been there asking for me. I hurried to her house, but was unable

to see her—she had gone to bed ; she never retires later than eleven o'clock. To make up for it, she gets up at sunrise, and this morning she sent for me even before daybreak. I told her everything, and I was surprised to see that she did not manifest the slightest surprise when I informed her where young Calprenède had spent the night. One would have sworn that she had been expecting the disagreeable news."

"That's strange."

"My dear fellow, she saw the count last evening, and I strongly suspect that Julien was the subject of their conversation ; I shouldn't be surprised too if you had been alluded to, for when I mentioned your name, she made a very significant grimace. But I couldn't get anything out of her ; in fact she displayed the most unusual reserve. She only told me that she would see my brother Adrien to-day and you may rest assured that she will defend the Calprenèdes warmly."

"Then the count must have anticipated his son's arrest," murmured Doutrelaise. "Does he know that Julien is in prison ?"

"My aunt has undoubtedly notified him. Besides, such news spreads quickly enough, everybody in the house must know it by this time. At least I am sure that Mademoiselle de la Calprenède knows it, for I met her just now on the staircase, and her eyes showed that she had been weeping. She is astir early. I couldn't help wondering where she was going."

"Was she alone ?" inquired Doutrelaise, making no attempt to conceal the emotion that his friend's announcement caused him.

"No," replied Jacques, "she was accompanied by a person whom I took to be her maid."

"She was probably going to church."

"That was what I thought. Still she is very fond of her brother, is she not, little as he deserves it ?"

"I believe so."

"Well, a strange idea occurred to me. I fancied for a moment that she was going to plead his cause with Monsieur Matapan. I thought she was perhaps going to ask him to withdraw his complaint."

"Mademoiselle de la Calprenède wouldn't degrade herself by asking a favour of a man like that," was the quick response.

"It seems hardly probable ; and now I think of it, she *did* go out. I had the curiosity to watch her, and I saw that she went lower than the first floor."

"Did she recognise you when she met you ?"

"Certainly. I bowed and she did the same ; and her eyes seemed to say : 'I know that this is the friend of Albert Doutrelaise, and I am sure he is going to see him.'"

"And you pretend to have read all this in a single glance ?"

"Yes, indeed, and even more, I detected a very strong feeling of friendliness for you. I was considerably surprised at this, for I fancied that Mademoiselle de la Calprenède knew the story of your midnight adventure, and that she would be very angry with you for having unconsciously brought about her brother's arrest. But I know now, that she bears you no malice. I am never mistaken in the language of a woman's eyes, and hers said plainly enough : 'I wish that I could go with you to your friend.'"

"Your conclusion lacks common sense, and I have no faith in your divining powers. But this isn't the question. What do you think of Julien's case ?"

" I don't doubt but what he stole the necklace," replied Jacques de Court-aumer curtly.

" And you think he will be convicted ? "

" I'm absolutely certain of it."

" Well, I'm equally certain that he is innocent."

" It's evident that you are in love with his sister, my poor friend. Passion bewilders the understanding. I should like to know your grounds for this conviction."

" Facts. Julien was not in the house at the time I met the man with the opal necklace ; Julien did not return until later. He will prove it, and, besides, my testimony must be heard," said Doutrelaise.

" I am surprised that you have not already been summoned to appear before my brother. But only a moment ago, you told me you should refuse to testify."

" I have changed my mind. I intend, on the contrary, to tell all I know ; I intend to say, for instance, that the man I met on the staircase was not, and could not be Julien. I did not see him, as I had no light, but I am sure he was not only taller, but stronger than Julien. He was considerably taller than I am, while Julien is a trifle shorter. Yesterday morning, I had the marks of five fingers about my wrist ; Julien, who has a woman's hand, could not have grasped mine so tightly."

" He is slight, that's true ; but he is excitable, like all the Calprenèdes," remarked Jacques.

" Besides, there is an even more convincing fact in his favour. This isn't the first time that his father's apartments have been entered."

" He said something of the kind last evening while we were driving to the dépôt with a Commissary of Police. But do you believe the story ? "

" Yes, certainly," said Doutrelaise.

" Whether it is true or false, Julien was wrong to tell it, for it is of a nature to compromise his sister."

" Mademoiselle de la Calprenède is above the reach of calumny," replied Doutrelaise, warmly.

" Granted," said Courtaumer ; " but an apartment where mysterious persons are coming and going at all hours of the night is not a suitable abode for a young girl. Fortunately, however, there is not one word of truth in what the youth told you. He merely invented these yarns to divert suspicion. Besides, what object could these pretended intruders have ? Julien says they have taken nothing. His father isn't supposed to possess a well filled money-box, and if there was anything to attract thieves to the house, it would rather be in the apartments of this fellow Matapan, who is said to be rolling in wealth."

" Yes, he is certainly wealthy, and his wealth makes him exceedingly presumptuous," said Doutrelaise. " Do you know the extent of his insolence ? He had certain views respecting Mademoiselle de la Calprenède. In fact, he wanted to marry her."

" At his age ? Is he mad ? Ugly as he is ! "

" No, he isn't mad ; he is only ambitious. His fortune doesn't give him access to the society which would gladly open its doors to the Count de la Calprenède's son-in-law."

" That's true. Then you think he has asked for Mademoiselle Arlette's hand and been refused ? "

" No one has told me so, but I am sure of it."

"And it would be for the sake of revenge that he brought this charge against Julien? A false charge to your idea."

"That man is capable of any crime."

"You didn't always have such a bad opinion of him, it seems to me. Only yesterday you were talking familiarly with him in a restaurant."

"I didn't know his real character then; but I understand it now."

Courtaumer was about to raise some new objections, when Albert's valet entered on tiptoe to tell his master that a lady wished to see him. "A closely veiled lady, sir," he said; "however, I fancied I recognised her."

"A veiled lady! Positively an adventure!" murmured Jacques de Courtaumer.

"Why don't you tell me her name, if you know who she is?" asked Doutrelaise, impatiently.

"You must excuse me if I am mistaken," replied the valet; "but it seemed to me this lady resembled Mademoiselle de la Calprenède."

"Impossible! You must be mistaken."

"There is a very simple way of ascertaining the truth, and that is to admit her."

"Did she ask to see me alone?" inquired Doutrelaise, turning to the servant.

"No, sir; she asked me if Monsieur Jacques de Courtaumer was not with you, sir."

"And when she learned that I was, didn't she show a disposition to go away?" interposed Jacques.

"None at all, sir. She remained."

"Then I can stay," was Jacques' conclusion, turning to Doutrelaise, who said to his valet: "Ask the lady to come in."

"Well, was I not right when I told you that I read a desire to come here in her eyes?" cried Courtaumer.

"There is nothing to prove that the visitor is Mademoiselle de la Calprenède," murmured Doutrelaise.

"I am satisfied on that point, and you will soon be the same," added Jacques, lowering his voice.

Just then the valet opened the door of the smoking-room, in which the two friends were sitting, and discreetly retired. A lady entered, heavily veiled and dressed in black. She advanced with an unfaltering step, and without any sign of hesitation. Young girls are not generally so composed in their bearing, or are they in the habit of paying morning-calls on unmarried gentlemen; and yet it was really Arlette. It was not necessary for her to raise her veil for Albert to be convinced of that. "Ah, mademoiselle," he exclaimed, "how can I thank you for the honour you do me, and for the confidence which you display in me? Had I known you wished to see me, I would have prevented a step—"

"Which you consider rather unseemly, do you not?" asked Arlette, revealing her lovely face. "I know it is wrong for me to come here alone, and it was only after long hesitation that I decided to do so. But I could bear it no longer;—Julien was arrested last night, and my father, who told me this terrible news, says things which I absolutely refuse to believe."

"I hope he did not tell you that I was the cause of Julien's misfortunes!" exclaimed Doutrelaise, eagerly.

"Yes, the cause—though, certainly, the unconscious cause. My father assured me that such was the case, and I did not know what to reply. I went to pray to God, and to ask Him to direct me, and it was after this

prayer that the thought of applying to you occurred to me. On going out I met Monsieur de Courtaumer, and supposed I should find him here. This gave me more courage, and I resolved not to see my father again until I had spoken to you. I entreat you to tell me the whole truth. My father has learned a part of it from a letter written by Madame de Vervins. I wish to know the rest."

"I only know what my friend Jacques has just told me. He was with your brother when the misfortune occurred."

"Then it is to you, sir, that I must appeal. You are not a stranger to me, since you are the nephew of my father's best and oldest friend. Is Julien still in prison, and is he really to be tried and condemned like a criminal?"

"I cannot conceal the fact that appearances are against your brother," replied Jacques, sadly. "But I truly hope that he will be able to prove his innocence."

"No; he won't succeed if his friends don't help him. But you are one of his friends, are you not?"

"I am certainly yours, as well as Albert Doutrelaise's, and he is ready to do anything you may command. It is for you to tell us, mademoiselle, how you wish to dispose of us."

"I thank you," she replied quietly. "We three will save him."

"Has Monsieur de la Calprenède abandoned his son?" inquired Courtaumer, with considerable embarrassment.

"My father is too much overwhelmed by the blow to be able to act, and yet immediate action is absolutely necessary. I can only rely upon you and Monsieur Doutrelaise, who will, I am sure, be happy to atone for the injury he has unintentionally done Julien."

"I would give my life to save him," replied Albert, warmly.

"However, you don't know what steps to take. I do; but I cannot act without your assistance. If I told you that the missing necklace was found in the study adjoining my brother's room, would you believe that Julien was guilty?"

"It would seem almost certain," said Jacques; "but, fortunately, this is only a supposition."

"It is the truth. My father found it there."

"Then all is lost," murmured Doutrelaise, despairingly.

"No; for you will prove that it was not Julien who took it."

"How can we do that?" inquired Jacques.

"By watching for the man who has entered our rooms several times at night."

"Ah!" exclaimed Doutrelaise, "I was certain that Julien told the truth."

"So he has related this extraordinary story of a nocturnal visitor to you, mademoiselle?" asked Courtaumer, who was still sceptical.

"It was only the truth. I have not seen the man, but I have heard him. I told my father about it, but he thought I must be the victim of my imagination, and still thinks so. Yesterday I was in doubt; now, however, I know that I was not mistaken."

"But what could be the object?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. I make no attempt to explain the mystery; but I feel certain that this person will come again. I have a presentiment of it, and I entreat you to watch for this intruder."

"We will detect him in the act. That is a good idea. We will carry it into execution this very night," said Doutrelaise.

"Agreed!" cried Courtaumer. "We will hide near the staircase, and if this midnight rover shows himself, we will apprehend him."

"But in that way, you would not succeed in capturing him. He would fly off on seeing you."

"We should overtake him."

"Perhaps so; but in that case he would deny the charge. You couldn't prove that he was creeping stealthily up the stairs to enter my father's rooms."

"While if we found him inside the apartments, he would be obliged to tell what brought him there. But to do that it would be necessary—"

"To conceal yourself there," said Arlette, quietly.

"But would the Count de la Calprenède allow us to do so? I doubt it."

"It would be better for him to know nothing about it. If I suggested the idea to him he would wish to act alone."

"And would thereby expose himself to danger," murmured Doutrelaise.

"I am equally unwilling for you to expose yourselves to danger," was Arlette's quick response.

"Danger is of no consequence. Julien's salvation is the only thing to be considered."

"Besides, there will be two of us," added Jacques, smiling. "Between us we will soon discover the scoundrel who ventures to intrude into your rooms. But it is extremely doubtful if he will pay you another visit for some time at least. He must be aware of what has taken place, and he will keep quiet for a while."

"However, I am extremely anxious to do what Mademoiselle de la Calprenède suggests," remarked Albert.

"And so am I," said Jacques; "but mademoiselle has just told us that her father would not allow us to conceal ourselves in his apartments."

"My father never goes into Julien's room at night, as Monsieur Doutrelaise knows. The room can be entered from the passage without passing through any of the adjoining apartments."

"But to enter this passage we must have—"

"The key of the apartments," said Arlette. "Here it is." And she drew it from her muff and handed it to Doutrelaise. "I need say no more," she added. "I can only pray for you and Monsieur de Courtaumer. If I hadn't known he was here, I should not have dared to come."

This was said with such an utter want of affectation that Jacques was deeply touched. He scarcely believed in Julien's innocence, and at first he had been rather shocked by Mademoiselle de la Calprenède's visit, but he was beginning to consider matters in a more sensible light. A brother's honour was so precious that a sister might surely be excused for compromising herself a little, especially when it was only in appearance. At the same time, he perceived that Arlette was exceedingly attractive. Until then, he had seen her only occasionally in a crowd, or at the promenade, and he had not realised that she differed to any perceptible extent from other young girls. Now, however, he suddenly discovered that Mademoiselle de la Calprenède was his ideal, the woman of whom he had always dreamed. Doutrelaise on his side knew that this child of nineteen summers possessed a heart of gold, and dauntless energy, and that she was ever ready for deeds of devotion and self-sacrifice. And though he had never told her that he loved her, he flattered himself that she had guessed his secret, and that she did not scorn his love.

"Then I can depend upon you?" she said to the two friends.

"Can you doubt it?" exclaimed Doutrelaise.

"No: and I leave Julien's fate in your hands. I have told you what occurs at night-time in this house, though the cause or motive of it I cannot divine. I have just given you the key of our apartments; you will, I am sure, do all that is necessary to discover the man who has intruded several times already. I have nothing more to say, and I leave everything to you."

"Still, it is necessary to agree upon some plan," exclaimed Jacques. "What if—"

"I have no plan," interrupted Arlette, "but I am firmly convinced that my brother is not guilty. If you have the same faith, you will save him." And after giving them both a look into which she threw her whole soul, she fled—that is really the word, for she had reached the door before Doutrelaise could overtake her. "Come no further," she said to him. "My maid is waiting for me on the staircase."

Albert, deeply moved, returned to his friend, who greeted him with these words: "You are certainly right in loving her. She is charming, and possesses unusual strength of character; that is evident. I did not know her."

"And now that you do know her, are you going to comply with your aunt's wishes?" asked Albert, quickly.

"Good heavens! how stupid lovers are!" cried Courtaumer, laughing. "Because I do justice to Mademoiselle de la Calprenède's charms, you fancy I must be in love with her! But she is sacred in my eyes, as you desire to marry her. Ah! if you had concealed your plans, I wouldn't be responsible for myself. But you confided them to me, and it is unnecessary to say more. It is the same thing to me as if Mademoiselle de la Calprenède was already Madame Doutrelaise. But let us speak of more practical matters. We have decided to embark in an extremely dangerous undertaking, and we must understand each other. How are we going to proceed? My idea is this: I will hide in the apartment—"

"No, no," responded Doutrelaise. "The undertaking will be dangerous, as you say. It is for me to face the peril."

"You egotist! Admit that you are jealous of your privileges of a lover, and that you wish to win all the glory in Mademoiselle Arlette's eyes! Well, I will not interfere with you. I will leave all the honour to you, and will help you just the same. This is what I propose: You will enter the apartments alone. That is only right, especially as she intrusted the key to you," said Jacques, somewhat mischievously.

"Besides, I know where to hide so as to take the wretch by surprise."

"That is true; you are familiar with the arrangements of the house. I might overturn some article of furniture, arouse all the tenants, and frighten the scamp we are after. But there is nothing to prevent me from remaining within call to help you."

"Not upon the staircase, however. The man would take alarm, and all the persons who come in would see you."

"No, for the gas is extinguished after midnight."

"They all have their candles downstairs. It was only by chance that I was without a light the other night."

"To hear you one would suppose that all the occupants of the house are night-birds. Let us pass them in review: Monsieur Matapan is hardly to be considered, he will not ascend to the second floor, as he lives on the

first one. Then there are the Bourleroys : the husband, wife and daughter don't come in at unheard-of hours, I suppose."

" Only when they go to a ball. But you forget the son who is always late. If he met you, fifty people would hear of it the next day."

" Oh, I can easily prevent him from gossiping, but I think it will be better not to have to deal with him. Let us try to find some other spot."

" There is but one practicable hiding-place. On a chair, near the window of this room, whence, as you can see, you will command a view of Julien de la Calprenède's chamber."

" Yes, that's so, upon my word !" exclaimed Courtaumer, going to the window to convince himself of the truth of his friend's assertion. " This is an admirable observatory. If the army were attacked, the relief corps would know of it."

" And if I need you, I will display a signal."

" A signal light, then, as it will be dark. Shall you provide yourself with a lantern ?"

" I don't know yet ; but there will be nothing to prevent me from opening the window and calling you, or even breaking a window pane should the call be urgent."

" Very well, as you insist that I shall hold myself in reserve—"

" Yes, my friend, I insist upon it. You will be very comfortable here. You will have a fire, and some cigars—"

" When shall we begin these midnight vigils in the Château Matapan ?" asked Courtaumer.

" This very night ; and if nothing happens we will try again to-morrow night, and so on till we have captured our man."

" All right, it is decided. You accept me as an auxiliary, don't you ?"

" Very gladly. I even rely upon you to say a good word for Julien to your brother."

" I have already told you that would be useless. But, by the way, what have you done with the opal ?"

" The opal ?" repeated Doutrelaise.

" Yes, the one which you severed from the necklace, and which you unfortunately showed to Monsieur Matapan ? It seems to me we have rather overlooked that in our calculations."

" I had not forgotten it. It is here ; I have put it carefully away."

" In my opinion, it would have been better to have thrown it into the Seine."

" I have had a strong desire to do so ever since I discovered the consequences of my adventure, but I thought I had no right to so dispose of it."

" It is indeed probable that Baron Matapan will claim it. I am rather surprised that he allowed you to keep it after he had seen it in your hands."

" Oh ! I understand why he did not tell me it belonged to him. He instantly formed a plan which he resolved to carry into execution. Whether Julien was guilty or not he was determined to denounce him, and have him arrested the same day ; and he was afraid of me. He thought I should divine his project and thwart him by warning the father or the son. To prevent this, he tried to make me think that the necklace had been stolen from one of his tenants, and merely requested me to keep the jewel I had secured."

"This Matapan is a clever rascal, there is no doubt of that. Have you seen him since yesterday morning?"

"No, and I'm not at all anxious to meet him again."

"You are wrong in that, perhaps. When a man has an enemy, it is as well to know what he is doing. By talking with Matapan, you might, perhaps, succeed in discovering his game. You think he has ventured to aspire to the hand of Mademoiselle de la Calprenède. I don't believe it. If I could only manage to have a talk with him, I would soon discover the truth. To throw him off his guard, I would begin by asking for some information about that pirate I met in the Champs-Elysées. I should like to know if the baron admits that he is one of that scoundrel's friends. And if such be the case, it would be advisable to apprise my brother at once of it, so as to enlighten him concerning this mysterious millionaire's acquaintances. But come, what do you think of these nocturnal visits to the Calprenèdes' rooms? Julien says he has often found furniture overturned in the morning. Mademoiselle Arlette declares she has heard people moving about. All this is so strange, I can't understand it. Apart from Matapan, have the Calprenèdes any enemies in the house?"

"Have they any? Why, I am their only friend. Have you forgotten what I told you on the Boulevard Haussmann, five minutes before I entered the house to meet with that infernal adventure which has been the cause of so many misfortunes?"

"No; you told me, I recollect very well, that all the Bourleroys were jealous of the Count de la Calprenède; and the scion of this charming family has certainly proved that he detests Julien."

"And that disagreeable doorkeeper, Marchefroid, who is Matapan's tool, of course, do you think he likes the occupants of the second floor?"

"His daughter isn't very likely to adore them, as she lives upon Monsieur Bourleroy's bounty. Does this Goddess of Liberty reside with her father?"

"No, Marchefroid has given her permission to board in the Quartier Bréda to complete her musical studies."

"And she has chosen that old fellow on the third floor for her professor! So you think that Marchefroid is Monsieur Matapan's tool?"

"I'm not sure of it, but it would certainly be advisable to watch him, and, indeed, to watch all the inmates of the house. Strange things are certainly going on here, and by mounting guard a few nights, we shall perhaps succeed in solving the mystery—and in proving that Julien de la Calprenède is not a thief," added Albert quickly.

"That is an entirely different matter," replied Jacques, shaking his head; "but whatever the result of our efforts may be, we shall have the consolation of knowing that we have done our best. You will undoubtedly be summoned to the Palais de Justice some time to-day, and I advise you not to go out, so that the messenger may find you at home. It is urgent that you should see my brother at the earliest possible moment, so as to try to mitigate the effect of your previous disclosures to Monsieur Matapan. I am going back to the Rue de Castiglione, where I shall wait for my aunt, who has been to see Adrien ere this, and who will be able to tell me the condition of affairs. Shall we meet at the club at six o'clock this evening?"

"No, no! we should be sure to meet a lot of persons who had heard of Julien's arrest, and who would ask us all sorts of troublesome questions."

" You are right. I will call for you between six and seven, and we will dine at some restaurant; after which we will return here, and spend the evening by your fireside. While we talk we can give an occasional glance at the Calprenède windows, and when we have seen all the lights extinguished—that is to say at about midnight—"

" Perhaps not so early as that. Mademoiselle Arlette sometimes sits up very late."

" You appear to keep a close watch on her movements," was Courtaumer's laughing reply.

" No," replied Doutrelaise, " but her room is exactly opposite mine, and it sometimes happens—"

" Very well, very well! I won't argue with you on the point. We will begin our duties at the hour agreed upon. It is decided that you shall have the most important and dangerous post. I will take up my quarters here. I only ask to introduce one change into our programme—a mere trifle: I shall make occasional excursions to the staircase."

" That will be very imprudent."

" No, for I shall only venture as far as the third floor. I shall content myself with listening over the balusters, and I will leave the door of your apartment open, so that I can take refuge inside if I am obliged to beat a retreat. I'll wear your slippers, so no one will hear me walking about. If necessary, I will even provide myself with list shoes. But, by the way, it wouldn't be a bad idea for you to give your valet leave of absence."

" No: but I am not at all afraid that he will discover our projects. Remember that it isn't at all likely we shall succeed this evening, and the attempt may have to be repeated several times. I can't send him out to sleep every night. Besides, he is a trusty fellow, who meddles with nothing, and who might render us valuable assistance in case we needed reinforcements."

" Very well. Everything is decided, then. I am going to get my breakfast now—I am nearly famished."

" Why, won't you breakfast with me?"

" Thanks—I want a walk, and I think you won't be sorry to have an opportunity for a little solitary reflection. You are in love, my dear fellow, more deeply in love than ever, and profound passion craves solitude. So I will take my departure," concluded Jaques, shaking hands with his friend, who allowed him to go off without very deep regret.

Jacques flew down the stairs four steps at a time, and on reaching the vestibule he saw M. Marchefroid, the doorkeeper, conversing with a stranger, who proved to be none other than the man with the pierced ears—the Chinese pirates' former pilot. " You here!" exclaimed Courtaumer, rather contemptuously.

" I merely came to call on my friend, Baron Matapan," replied the sailor. " Have you just left him?"

" What do you take me for?" retorted Jacques. " I only visit my friends, and your baron is no friend of mine, I assure you."

And he proceeded on his way, without troubling himself about the frown that Marchefroid bestowed upon him. But as he walked up the boulevard, he said to himself that he had perhaps made a mistake, and that it would have been much better not to have avowed his hostility towards M. Matapan in the presence of the doorkeeper, and in the hearing of a person who could scarcely fail to repeat his uncourteous remark to the baron himself. However, five minutes afterwards, Jaques had forgotten all about it. He had

made a mistake. Nothing is lost in this world, and he had good cause to be convinced of this fact some time afterwards.

IX.

AN abode seldom fails to give a keen observer some knowledge of the habits of its inmates, and it was only necessary to enter M. Matapan's rooms to understand the character of the person with whom one had to deal. In his so-called reception-rooms—where no one was ever received—this millionaire had crowded everything that money could buy: superb furniture, costly clocks, gleaming mirrors, soft carpets, silken hangings, marvels in imitation buhl and Dresden china, and spurious productions of the old masters. Not a single family portrait, not an article bearing the signet of an individual taste, but on the other hand plenty of gilt-edged books that had never been opened; fireplaces in which no fires ever blazed; and crystal chandeliers, filled with candles that had never been lighted. One could see at a glance that the owner did not enjoy this magnificence, and that he only made this sacrifice to display for form's sake and out of deference to the opinion of others, so that he might not be accused of avarice, but command the respect of his tenants. The fact is, he did not feel at ease in these luxurious saloons which he rarely entered. His time was spent in his rooms in the right wing of the house—the famous wing which he had built for his personal convenience, and the internal arrangement of which was identical on each floor—there being four rooms which opened into each other, although at the same time each of them could be entered by a side passage. Baron Matapan had arranged these four rooms to suit his fancy—transforming them into a kind of nest from which he seldom emerged. They could each of them be used for any purpose; he could sleep in whichever one he chose, for they were all furnished in the same style—a style eminently Oriental, although meagre in character. There were plenty of divans, large and small, piles of cushions instead of chairs, and small, low tables, such as can be seen in Turkish harems. The only ornaments upon the walls were weapons of every kind, ancient and modern, French and foreign, all of them hung up haphazard without any attempt whatever at symmetrical arrangement. Here and there, however, stood cabinets of heavily carved oak, laden with antique gold and silver plate, which looked as if it had been obtained at the sacking of a town or a church. Not a single bed or writing-desk was to be seen; but chandeliers hung from every ceiling—chandeliers which were often lighted at midday, for the windows were of stained glass, through which sunshine could barely force its way, and a fire, hot enough to roast a salamander, blazed even during the summer in every chimney place.

Evidently enough the occupant of this abode must be a person of eccentric tastes, and any Parisian would have found it difficult to adapt himself to the existence led there. As a natural consequence, M. Matapan had no intimate friends, and but few persons had ever crossed the threshold of his private apartments. Even the doorkeeper, Marchefroid, was not admitted there when he came four times a year to bring the quarters' rents, and yet Marchefroid was a favourite with the baron, who did not disdain to chat with him occasionally.

Matapan's sanctuary was guarded by a servant, very peculiar in appearance and exceedingly swarthy in complexion. He evidently belonged to a copper-skinned race, although he had the features and hair of a European.

No doubt he was a half-breed, brought at an early age from Java or some other Dutch colony in the far East, and thoroughly civilised by a prolonged sojourn in Paris. He wore no livery, but dressed in French style, and was greatly admired by all the servant girls in the neighbourhood. The name of this acclimatised slave was Ali, and he possessed a host of valuable accomplishments, amongst them that of cooking to suit the taste of his master, who never ate away from home. Ali was cook, valet, steward, and secretary at once, in short, he did everything that was necessary, as the baron kept no carriage, but was content to hire a vehicle whenever he needed one. We should also add that although M. Matapan never entertained any body at home, the indefatigable Ali was on duty every evening, as his master never dined out.

Strange as it may appear, the eccentric habits of this millionaire had not excited much comment. No reporter had ever called upon him for the purpose of describing his habits for a society journal, and it is probable that any interviewer of the kind would have been very ungraciously received.

M. Matapan was to all appearance an exceedingly peaceable citizen. He belonged to a club, had his tradesmen, and his architect. He dressed like everybody else, took a walk almost every day, and no one was more affable than himself. Every one knew that he was a bachelor, and very fond of solitude, which explained why he did not give entertainments; and the idea of accusing him of surrounding himself with secrecy had never occurred to any body. His tenants were probably the only persons who considered him remarkably retiring in disposition. The Bourleroys sometimes complained a little on that account, for they would have liked M. Matapan to open those drawing-rooms of his, in which he could have given such delightful balls. They accused him of not living in a style suited to his means, and suspected him of being miserly; but they esteemed him highly, and Mademoiselle Herminie would have been very willing to marry him.

As the Commissary of Police had certified to the investigating magistrate, the baron had never had any dealings with the department of justice until the morning when he was summoned to testify before Adrien de Courttaumer, and on the evening of that memorable day he dined alone, as usual. But after dinner he received a visitor, whom he was evidently expecting, and whom he had already met during the morning—the same visitor, in fact, that Jacques de Courttaumer had seen and recognised in the hall, after parting with his friend Doutrelaise.

Ali had been warned, and by eight o'clock everything was in readiness for the ex-pilot's reception. The second room in the right wing—the one which corresponded with Julien de la Calprenède's study overhead—was brilliantly lighted up, and as hot as a furnace. There it was that the baron generally established himself after his evening repast (which never occupied more than twenty minutes), and there he remained until he retired for the night to a divan in the room beyond, which invariably occurred at ten o'clock precisely.

It was now nine P.M. Matapan, sitting with his legs crossed under him in the Turkish fashion, had just raised the amber mouthpiece of a long cherry pipe to his lips. Opposite him, in the same posture, sat the man with the pierced ears, drawing long puffs of smoke through a nargheel, the flexible tube of which lay coiled in a vessel full of rose-water. Between them, on a low, sandal-wood table inlaid with pearl, stood several Venetian glasses, and decanters filled with different liquors, with a silver

chafing-dish, under which a piece of fragrant aloes-wood was burning. It was an Oriental scene, occidentalized by the presence of rum and gin. Ali was not there. His master had just dismissed him, and the half-breed had gladly availed himself of the permission to retire to his couch.

"So you have renounced a seafaring life, my friend?" inquired the baron of the man with the pierced ears.

"Yes, I have risked my life often enough, and I now feel inclined to enjoy myself a little."

"And you think you will do that in Paris? Why, I have been here a dozen years, and have not yet been able to feel at home."

"That's your own fault, Matapan—you ought to marry. When a man becomes a peaceable citizen he ought to act like his fellows. It was all very well for you to remain a bachelor when you were scouring the seas with me, but now that you have taken root here, and become a landlord, you ought not to remain single. Such a thing was never heard of."

"But I am growing old, Giromon. You forget I'm fifty-three," grumbled the baron, swallowing a glass of gin.

"Bah! you are as solid as an iron-clad. I'm in my fifty-sixth year, and if I can find a wife to suit me I shall marry without any haggling."

"Yes, but there's the rub. A man can't find one; or if he can, he is no better off. The young lady wouldn't have you—or if she would her parents wouldn't."

"Are they, then, so hard to please? To hear you talk one would think you had tried it."

"No later than yesterday, my friend. I asked for the hand of a girl who hasn't a penny, and I was turned out of doors."

"What, you? I thought you were worth millions."

"Eight at least. And the father hasn't money enough to pay for his daughter's *trousseau*."

"Is he mad?"

"No, he's a count. He fancies that he's the offspring of Jupiter, and that I am no more a baron than you are."

"Oh, that is true; you are a baron. You told me this morning you had purchased your title, so in that case it belongs to you, and I don't see why any one should despise it. A baron is as good as a count, any day."

"You don't understand these matters, my friend."

"But—I am told that one can do anything with money in Paris."

"All the evil one wishes, undoubtedly. But when it comes to marrying, that is quite another thing. However, I have had my revenge. I have struck these people in their most sensitive spot. The son has been arrested on my complaint, and he will be convicted of theft. They will all be irretrievably disgraced."

"Good! that'll teach them to refuse a man like yourself—a capital sailor, wealthy, and with a title besides. But how did you manage to play them such a trick?"

"A capital opportunity offered itself. I hadn't thought of such a thing, and was trying my best to devise some way of rounding on them, when I discovered yesterday that a valuable opal necklace of mine was missing. It was composed of opals, surrounded with diamonds. You perhaps remember it."

"Was it the one you had for your share of the spoil at the end of our first cruise in the 'Gavial'?"

"The same."

"And you have kept it for twenty-seven years? For that was in '53, if I remember rightly."

"Yes. But are you surprised I didn't sell it? I have always had a fondness for handsome jewels, and these are superb. Besides, I don't regret having kept them now, for I had no difficulty in recognizing them in the office of the investigating magistrate. For they have been found again, and the thief proves to be the brother of the young lady I just spoke of."

"How did he obtain possession of them? Does he visit you?"

"No, but he had a key to my apartment. These people live in this house and formerly occupied these rooms. It is only about two months ago that they moved to the second floor, which I had previously occupied."

"I understand. A key was lost in the excitement of moving, and they found it. But they certainly hadn't the key of your safe, and I don't suppose you leave your jewels lying about."

"I had taken this necklace out of my safe to examine it, and I had left it in a drawer that wasn't locked. The thief entered during the night—"

"And you didn't wake up?"

"No, I am a very sound sleeper. Ali sleeps in another part of the house, and the thief only had to look about a little to lay his hand on the jewels."

"It is fortunate that he didn't lay his hand on something even more valuable. You must have a nice little sum hoarded up here; but no, you deposit your money at the Bank of France, of course."

"Not I! The Bank of France is a fine institution, but it will burst some day or other. I have no confidence in such places: I only trust myself."

"And you are quite right. I deposited my money there on my arrival, and have repented doing so already. If I owned a house, as you do, I should secrete all my money in it, but mine wouldn't occupy as much space as your millions."

"When I had this house built, I contrived several hiding-places, I do not mind telling you so, for I know you won't go about repeating it. I had one upstairs, and I have one here, and the devil himself couldn't find it."

"Ha, ha! what if your tenant on the floor above has been sounding the walls?"

"He would discover nothing whatever. In the first place, you may rest assured that I have only left a vacant place in his abode. And even that space I defy him to discover. The mason who constructed the hiding-place, under my directions, died a long time ago, and I haven't revealed my secret to any one. Even if you asked it of me, I wouldn't tell you, Giromon."

"You would be perfectly right, and I sha'n't be foolish enough to ask you."

"Oh, it isn't because I distrust you, but merely out of principle. No one but myself shall know where my gold, jewels, and bonds are kept. I am as jealous of my wealth as I should be of my wife, if I had one, and perhaps even more so; and if you knew what a pleasure I take in looking at it, and handling it every evening before I go to bed, you would understand why I never spend the night away from home."

"I understand it so well that I wonder why you have ever thought of marrying."

"Pooh! it was a mere whim. I wished to have a son to inherit my fortune, but the caprice is past."

"But haven't you any relatives in Mauritius?"

"I have never known any, thank Heaven! I was found at the foot of a cocoa-tree."

"You are lucky. I have relatives somewhere in Brittany, but they have never troubled themselves about me, and I don't trouble myself about them. But tell me, old fellow, when you shuffle off this mortal coil will your property go to the government?"

"This house, yes, if I don't make a will; but the rest, no one shall have it—that is, unless you purchase this house by auction after my death, and have it demolished in order to obtain possession of its contents. Now that I have told you this you will probably decide on the speculation. It wouldn't be a bad one."

"I shall never be rich enough to attempt it. Besides, I shall die first."

"Marry, since you are so inclined. You can bequeath the secret to your children."

"Nothing would please me better," was Giromon's laughing reply. "Introduce me to a girl who has a handsome dowry, and who isn't too ugly. Not a countess, though. She wouldn't have me."

"Upon my word! perhaps I know one that would suit you. What would you say to a young lady whose father has amassed a fortune in the drug business, and is not too exacting in regard to credentials eh?"

"Oh, I should tell him to send to China for his information. As he would think that too far to go, he would content himself with conferring with my notary—not that I have any as yet, but I shall have one before long."

"I think Monsieur Bourleroy would be satisfied with that. It remains to be seen whether you will please his daughter Herminie, however."

"I can try," was Giromon's modest reply, as he puffed away vigorously at his nargheel, which was beginning to go out.

"Are you sure that I am the only person acquainted with your past life?" inquired the baron, after a short pause.

"Everyone else who ever knew me, thinks I have either drank myself to death or been hanged before this time. When we were scouring the ocean, and afterwards when I was in league with those charming Chinamen, I figured under assumed names, and now no one would suppose for a moment that Jean Giromon, the capitalist, was formerly—Ah, the deuce! I had quite forgotten. There is one man in Paris who met me at Saigon five years ago."

"That's unfortunate. Who is it, pray?"

"A gentleman who was then a lieutenant on the ship 'Juno,' Monsieur de Courtaumer."

"Courtaumer!" exclaimed Matapan. "What! do you know a gentleman of that name?"

"I know him very well," replied Giromon, considerably surprised by his companion's evident consternation. "He did me a great service down there. But for him, I should certainly have had a noose around my neck. I had been captured—I have told you the circumstances—and Courtaumer was in command of the gunboat that took us, but instead of having me hanged, he defended me before the maritime commission by which I was tried."

"Which doesn't prove that he believed you innocent, however. And this gentleman knows you are in Paris, you say?"

"He saw me yesterday while we were breakfasting at the same restaurant, and I afterwards took a seat beside him in the Champs-Elysées. I

even spoke to him and reminded him of the sorry predicament from which he extricated me."

" You certainly must have been drunk. What need was there of exposing yourself in such a manner ? "

" I confess I was wrong ; and I instantly discovered that I had made a mistake, for he was anything but gracious. He even told me that he considered me a very suspicious character."

" What the deuce were you thinking of ? Do you know who this man is ? He is a relative of the magistrate who examined me to-day, and who openly defended the thief. He tried to induce me to withdraw my charge. I certainly hope you didn't tell this lieutenant that you were acquainted with me."

" I did ; I hadn't the slightest idea it would displease you, however."

" Well, this is a little too much ! You meet an officer who found you in the company of pirates, and you mention me as one of your friends. With what object, pray ? "

" Why, he treated me so contemptuously that I was anxious to show him I had influential acquaintances in Paris."

" I didn't know you were such a boaster. It would have been much better if you had held your tongue. Since I retired from business, I have always been exceedingly cautious whenever anyone questioned me about my past life. A single imprudent word may cost one dear ; and just now, particularly, I am obliged to be on my guard. When a man has any dealings with the department of justice, even as a witness, he must expect to be scrutinised closely. However, what did Monsieur de Courtaumer say when you spoke of me ? "

" Nothing at all, for the very good reason that just as I mentioned your name, one of his friends came up and took him away. But I fancy he would always have known that I'm acquainted with you, even if I hadn't mentioned your name, for he saw me talking to your doorkeeper this morning."

" This morning ? "

" Yes. I am still in the habit of rising with the sun, and I didn't know you were never to be seen until noon, so I called here at about ten o'clock to ask you to breakfast with me. The doorkeeper told me, however, that you couldn't be seen then. By the way, he seems to be a very obliging and devoted servant to you."

" Yes ; I rescued him from poverty, and I would trust no one else to guard my house, or myself ; but let us return to this man Courtaumer."

" Well, while I was talking with Marchefroid—what strange names these Parisians have—the naval officer passed by."

" Did he recognise you ? "

" Oh, instantly, and as he eyed me contemptuously, I said to him, ' Well, you see I wasn't boasting yesterday, when I told you I was the friend of Baron Matapan. '

" Idiot ! that certainly caps the climax."

" My dear fellow, I conceal nothing. I wish you to know just what you have to expect. I even asked him if he had come from your rooms which was very stupid, as Monsieur Marchefroid had told me you were at home to no one."

" And what did Courtaumer reply ? "

" He answered that he only visited his friends, and that you were not one of the number. And in such a tone ! If you could only have heard

him ! I was going to retort, but he went straight by without stopping again."

Matapan, instead of replying, poured out a glass of rum and drained it at a single draught. It was his source of inspiration in trying moments. This narrative had plainly given him food for reflection, and he was asking advice of his faithful friend, old Tom.

Giromon also thought it his duty to indulge in a glass of the same beverage to console himself for the blunder he had committed.

"I would have cheerfully given two thousand piastres to insure your silence," remarked the baron, after a time, "and if I were a hard-hearted man, I should consign you to eternal perdition for the injury you have done me ; but I shall never forget the dangers we braved together, and if you will promise to never again—"

"May I be hanged to the yard-arm if I ever say another word about you. I'll be as mute as a fish, hereafter. So you are acquainted with this ex-lieutenant also ? "

"Not exactly. I'm not even on speaking terms with him, although I meet him very often. But he sides with the Calprenèdes, I'm sure of it."

"The Calprenèdes ! I never heard of them."

"The thief's name is Julien de la Calprenède. His father is a count. Courtaumer also is a count, or something of the kind."

"And the aristocrats side together. I understand now."

"Moreover, he is the friend of a young fellow called Doutrelaise, who occupies my fourth floor, and who will have to give evidence in this necklace affair, for it was he who unconsciously put me on the track. He met the thief upon the staircase ; he even wrenched one of my opals out of his hand. He has it still, and will be obliged to return it to me."

"Then he can't be on the side of these Calprenèdes."

"I don't know, but I suspect he will be inclined to defend them, for reasons which it is not necessary for me to explain. It is more than likely that Courtaumer had just left Doutrelaise's rooms when you saw him pass through the hall—that is, if he was not coming from Calprenède's apartments, where he may have gone to hold a conference. This would be even more unfortunate, for the magistrate belongs to the same family, and would probably be guided by his brother's advice. Indeed, I would willingly wager almost anything that this ex-lieutenant has already spoken to the magistrate, who urged me to let the prosecution drop. Nor should I be at all surprised if it was he who gave him my necklace. Yes, that's it. The father finds it in the room of his scapegrace son, sends for the lieutenant, and entreats him to give the stolen article to his relative, the magistrate. Giromon, I forgive you. You have done me a service without suspecting it. Thanks to you, I now see through these people's scheme, and will govern myself accordingly."

"That's fortunate, indeed !" exclaimed Giromon. "And you are no longer angry with me ? "

"Not if you will promise to be discreet in future."

"Oh, you have given me a good lesson, and I shall profit by it. I have no desire to quarrel with you, particularly as I have a business project to propose to you."

"A business project ? We'll discuss it. But in the first place, let one thing be plainly understood. You can see me every day, if you like ; but only in the evening, from eight to ten. If you come earlier, you'll disturb

me ; and if you come later you will disturb me still more, for I don't wish my hours for retiring to be interfered with."

"Agreed. I'll drop in after dinner, and you can send me away when you have had enough of me."

"What kind of a life are you leading here?"

"One that I already feel tired of. I stroll about, and eat and drink—all of which costs me a good deal of money and affords me very little amusement. The cookery is insipid ; the cognac resembles sweetened water ; the women have *papier-mâché* faces ; the theatres are little cramped boxes, in which a man feels as if he were suffocating."

"And yet you talk of marrying a Parisienne."

"For her money ; but she must have a good deal of it, for, if I succeed in the enterprise I'm contemplating, I shall be rich enough to dispense with other people's coin. I shall return to Italy—that country suits me—and live as you do, *tête-à-tête* with my ducats."

"An enterprise, you say ? Do you contemplate a return to your former profession ? You would make a great mistake, my dear fellow. To incur the risk of hanging is all very well when a man has his fortune to make, but when it is made—"

"Honesty is the best policy. That's my opinion ; and the undertaking I am about to propose is strictly honest. It is merely to obtain possession of a treasure which will be lost to everyone if I don't recover it."

"Treasures !" repeated the baron, scornfully. "I don't believe in them, at least except in such as I've seen and touched, like mine, for instance. After the Revolution it was a good time to search for hidden treasure. The nobles who emigrated had a mania for secreting their money in walls or cellars, and I have known men who made handsome fortunes by demolishing old mansions ; but those days are over."

"Not at all," growled Giromon. "Didn't you tell me a moment ago that the person who bought this house after your death—"

"You had better not take what I said literally, my dear fellow. I will take proper precautions that my treasure doesn't fall into the hands of the first-comer. But let us speak of yours. Are you really in earnest?"

"Quite so. It is in your power to double your fortune by helping me to become the possessor of several millions ?"

"Such an assertion is worthy of attention, certainly. Have you discovered some new guano islands ? That commodity is greatly reduced in price ; still, we might make a good thing out of it."

"No, it isn't that."

"A gold mine, perhaps, or a diamond field ?"

"Neither. But speaking of gold mines, do you know where the most gold is located ?"

"In California, Australia, or Peru, probably. Do you mean to subject me to an examination in geography ?"

"I mean to give you some useful information. The best gold mine, my friend, is the bottom of the sea."

"The galleons of Vigo ! Thanks, I was once foolish enough to believe in them, and lost a hundred thousand francs in consequence."

"You will lose nothing in the undertaking I propose. If we don't succeed, we shall only lose our time and labour."

"I don't understand you. Speak plainly, and I'll answer you."

"Then, listen attentively. Have I ever told you what I did after parting with my friends, the Chinese ?"

"No ; I only know that you deposited your money in a Calcutta bank, and retired from business."

"That's true. I had narrowly escaped hanging, and that alarmed me, Besides, I was rich enough. I wanted to rest and return to Europe. I took the longest route, however, going to Japan and thence to America, where I remained three years. I had some idea of establishing a large commission house in Colorado, for the transmission of precious metals to England, but eventually I gave up the project. I wasn't born for commerce. At the end of the third year, in January, 1879, I decided to return to Paris and see how I should like the place."

"In January, '79 ! Why, it is now December, 1880, and you have only just arrived."

"Which is due to the fact that I met with numerous adventures on the way. In the first place, instead of taking passage on one of the steamers plying between New York and Havre, I embarked from Vera Cruz, being anxious to catch a glimpse of Mexico, and I chose a sailing vessel—I don't like steamers."

"That's only natural, being accustomed to them. Besides, you made your fortune on fast sailing vessels—the 'Gavial,' for instance."

"For this reason, or some other, I embarked on a fine ship bound for Liverpool. It was chartered by a Californian, whose acquaintance I had made in Mexico, and who was very glad to have me accompany him. This fellow had some twelve million dollars in gold ; that is to say, bullion, which he said had been extracted from a mine in Sonora. However this may be, these twelve millions were in iron chests on board the ship which he had chartered, and which was to take us to Liverpool, for he hoped to find a better market for his gold in London."

"I think I begin to understand. You were shipwrecked, your Californian was drowned, and his money boxes went to the bottom of the sea."

"That isn't quite it ; but listen to me. We had almost reached our destination in safety when we met with a tempest at about one hundred miles from land in the Bay of Biscay ; however, we should certainly have weathered it if our rudder had not been carried away on the evening of the second day. There being no possible way of guiding the ship then, we were left to the mercy of God."

"And God was merciful enough to drive your ship on the coast," remarked the baron, ironically.

"No, not upon the coast, but upon something worse. At midnight, when the sky was as black as ink, we struck a rock, and the ship went to pieces almost instantly. My Californian was asleep in his berth. He never woke up. The captain was swept off the deck by an immense wave just before the vessel went to pieces."

"And you escaped ?"

"Yes, a wave luckily threw me upon the rock which had caused the destruction of our vessel, and I managed to cling to a crag. If I believed in miracles, I should say that this was one, for I was the sole survivor—the only person saved out of twenty-two men on board."

"And a passing vessel rescued you the next morning, I suppose."

"No ; I remained there for twenty hours, and finally escaped without the assistance of any one."

"How ? By swimming to the shore ?"

"Yes ; it wasn't very far off, and I was able to rest several times during

my journey. The approach to the coast is dotted with small islands and rocks."

"I think I know the part. On reaching the shore you were hospitably received by the people of the district, I suppose."

"The district is almost a wilderness; besides, I must admit that I didn't try to find any of the inhabitants."

"But you must have required nursing and attention."

"Bah! I'm used to hardships. I was bruised and sore, and well nigh famished, but no bones were broken, and I had a thousand dollars in American coin in a belt round my waist. Besides, a letter of credit was awaiting me in London. Under such circumstances, a man can dispense with help. And, besides, I had my reasons for wishing to keep the whole matter secret."

"What! did you even then think of recovering the Californian's millions?"

"I had a vague idea of some such attempt. I said to myself: 'No one knows of the shipwreck, or the place where it occurred except myself. Something will finally be discovered, no doubt. Fragments of the vessel will drift to the shore, and the waves will strew the beach with the bodies of the drowned men. Fishermen will begin a search, and the companies in which the vessel was insured will try to recover the lost treasure; but it is more than probable that all these attempts will prove futile, if I don't reveal the exact spot where the shipwreck occurred. If the companies fail to find the place, the millions will remain where they are. In any case, I shall lose nothing by holding my tongue.' It was one of the occasions when one might truly say that 'Silence is golden.' Well, after drying myself in the hut of some coast-guards, who believed I had been overtaken by the rising tide, I walked to the nearest railway station."

"Without making any announcement to the marine authorities?"

"Without saying a word on the subject to any one."

"Do you know that was wonderfully shrewd on your part, Giromon?" exclaimed Matapan.

"Pooh! it was a very easy matter, and you would have done the same. I was merely taking the necessary precautions in case the shipwreck should never be discovered, which seemed by no means likely. I must admit that I didn't count much upon it."

"And what did happen?"

"I was lucky all through. The ship was insured in London, and consigned to a Liverpool merchant. I have just spent two years in England, and I assure you I lost no opportunity of making inquiries in a quiet way. The insurance companies and the consignee have done their best to solve the mystery that enshrouds the fate of the lost vessel, but have never obtained the slightest information about her. They have now quite given her up. There has been a law suit between my Californian's heirs and the insurance companies. It has not yet been finally decided, but all on board the ship have been declared dead."

"Then, legally considered, you are a dead man."

"I neglected to satisfy myself of that fact, for I am only moderately interested in it, as I was registered under an assumed name; but I have satisfied myself on this point, that no one except myself knows where those twelve millions are."

"But are there no fishermen on the coast?"

"As many and even more than elsewhere."

"And are they so stupid then—have they so little curiosity that they can see the shore strewn with dead bodies and the fragments of a wrecked vessel without making any attempt to discover whence they came? This is extremely improbable, my friend. The inhabitants of the region must know as much about the affair as you do."

"I can convince you that you are mistaken. In the first place, shipwrecks are of frequent occurrence along that coast. There had been at least three or four during that same month of January, and two of the vessels were American ones. The bodies that were washed ashore were not sent to America to be identified; and no one knows that a vessel, with its cargo of gold, lies there under thirty fathoms of water. I have made sure of it."

"But how?"

"My dear fellow, I went there three successive summers under the pretext of fishing and sea-bathing, and took up my abode in a cottage but a few miles from the rock where the vessel sunk. I was there again three months ago, and spent six weeks on the spot. I have made the acquaintance of everybody in the neighbourhood, and am considered an eccentric man, who only cares for fishing and boating. I hired a boat and a vehicle and went about everywhere, talking freely with all the country people, and I assure you that if any one of them had known anything about the lost treasure, I should have discovered it. They all like me, and don't distrust me in the least."

"And didn't the men who saw you the day after the shipwreck recognise you?"

"Who? The two coast-guards and the four or five peasants of whom I asked my way? You forget that they now take me for an English lord."

"And you think you could find the spot?"

"I should say so. I have at least twenty times revisited and examined the rock upon which I spent that terrible night. It is an excellent place for fishing, so my frequent visits have excited no comment, and as I once took a sounding-line with me, I was able to ascertain the exact position of the wreck."

"And you suggest recovering these millions from the depths of the sea? In that case why have you waited so long?"

"In the first place, I wished to give the interested parties time to grow weary of their attempts to ascertain the ship's fate. For six months, indeed for nearly a year, the disappearance of this richly-laden ship created a great deal of comment both in England and America. The newspapers often alluded to it, and indulged in all sorts of conjectures. People even went so far as to credit a report that it had been captured by pirates, who had burned it after extracting the chests of gold, and murdering the crew."

"It would have been a fine prize indeed, and if we had been fortunate enough to encounter one like it, while we were on board the 'Gavial'—

"We should not have allowed such an opportunity to escape us. Well, it only depends upon ourselves to meet with such another, and we can profit by it without the slightest danger, as there is no one to protect the spoil."

"There is the sea; the most formidable of adversaries."

"That's nothing when a man knows how to contend with it. Two years have elapsed: there have been hundreds of shipwrecks since, and that one is forgotten. The coast is clear for us."

" You say 'us.' Do you think of associating me in your enterprise ? "

" Of course, since I have told you my secret."

" You are very kind, I am sure," said M. Matapan, rather coldly. " But I don't see what object you can possibly have in associating me in the enterprise."

" Then you count the pleasure of doubling the fortune of an old friend as nothing ? "

" Absolutely nothing. You see I'm frank."

" Well, you are mistaken. It was our former friendship that decided me to apply to you—for I could apply to nobody else."

" Then you admit that you cannot succeed unhelped ? "

" I admit it."

" And that you need the help of some one with plenty of money ? "

" Not by any means. I have all and more than is necessary to conduct the undertaking as I desire to conduct it. Do you suppose I mean to go there with any amount of paraphernalia, and intend to hire an army of workmen ? In that case, we should have little hope of seeing our millions. There would be a great commotion as soon as our men recovered the first chest of gold. The news would spread all over the world, and we should be involved in lawsuits with all the underwriters in England."

" That's very likely, and for this reason your miraculous fishery is utterly impracticable. We should only give ourselves a great deal of trouble to enrich other people."

" I'm not such a fool. We will be the only workers, and no one will know anything about it."

" I don't say that you are a fool, but I'm certain that you are mad. Where have you ever seen any two men who could extract from the sea a number of chests covered with twenty fathoms of water ? "

" Well, in the first place, I have been engaged for two years in preparations for the undertaking. I did not lose any time while I was on the other side of the channel. Instead of strolling about the streets of London, I took up my abode at Whitstable, a small English town which is mainly inhabited by men who only engage in submarine works. They furnish recruits for the company of English divers, a large and exceedingly prosperous corporation, by the way. They purchase wrecked vessels for nominal sums, and I assure you that they don't lose by the operation. For instance, if these men knew the whereabouts of this wreck which we are keeping for ourselves, they would go to the officers of the insurance companies and say to them : ' If you will sell us all your rights to this property, we will pay you one million or two millions cash, and, at our own risk and expense, we will work this gold mine, which is nothing to you, while it will perhaps yield us twelve millions.' "

" I understand. But in what way will these men be of service to you ? "

" They won't be of service to me ; they *have been*. They taught me to dive."

" Bah ! " exclaimed Matapan, " so you are a diver now ? I didn't know you possessed that accomplishment. Then you can fish for pearls like the poor devils we saw in Ceylon ? "

" Nothing of the kind," replied Giromon. " Those people are savages, who only know how to hold their breath for two or three minutes, and quickly rise to the surface after gathering a quantity of pearl oysters."

"It is true that they wouldn't be able to raise a chest of bullion to the surface," sneered the baron.

"No," was the quiet reply ; "but the Whitstable divers use an apparatus which enables them to remain for a long time under water, and to work there in comparative comfort."

"I have seen it. The invention isn't new by any means."

"No, but it is excellent when a man knows how to use it, and I know how. The apprenticeship one is obliged to serve is long, but I became an expert, and thanks to the repeated experiments I made, I am now capable of undertaking the most difficult submarine operations. When I have my helmet on my head, I am as comfortable at the bottom of the sea as if I were walking down the boulevard in my overcoat."

"Provided they send you plenty of air through the tube ?"

"Certainly. I haven't yet learned the art of breathing like a fish."

"Then you require the help of several persons ?"

"No. Usually there are three : the diver, and two men who work the air-pumps ; but in an emergency two will suffice in all."

"What ! is a single man sufficient for the pump ?"

"I am certain of it. I tried, and the attempt was successful. A little actice is all that is necessary, especially when one has been a sailor. And you were, and are still, a thorough sailor."

"I'm a trifle rusty, perhaps, but for all that I shouldn't be much at a loss if I had a ship to command. And so you have chosen me to man the pump ?"

"That is to say, I could think of no one else. It is the post of honour. Remember that the life of the diver depends upon the comrade who sends him air. If he paused for an instant—"

"I understand : the other would die of asphyxia. Really, the twelve millions would be a temptation. There are some scoundrels who wouldn't care to share them with a friend."

"Oh, I have no fears so far as that is concerned. The person who might treat the diver in such a manner would gain nothing by his rascality, for he couldn't work alone, and the gold would remain where it is."

"Unless the scoundrel deferred the execution of his infamous scheme until the last descent. He might allow his colleague to bring up all but the contents of one chest. Even if he abandoned that, he would derive a very handsome profit from the enterprise."

"Your suggestion is anything but reassuring," rejoined Giromon. "But I know that you like to jest, and I'm not afraid of you. I shall, merely use your objection to demonstrate the fact that I could only propose the project to a tried friend."

"Admit for a moment that I am this friend, and that I learn to handle the air-pump successfully ; now do me the favour to explain how you intend to conduct the enterprise."

"Why, we will both go to the little village of which I have spoken. I know an isolated house there which is very comfortable, and which we can hire whenever we like. We will take no one with us. We can engage some woman in the village to come and do the little cooking and house-work we require. This will surprise none of the inhabitants. I have always lived in that way when I have been there. You will pass for an eccentric man with tastes similar to mine—an enthusiastic amateur fisherman and boatman. I have everything that is needful : a sailing boat that two men can manage, lines and ropes of every description—"

"And a diver's costume?"

"We will send for that. It will come carefully packed in boxes, which can be carried unopened into our house, and which we will unpack ourselves. As soon as we are fully equipped we will begin work. We will spend most of our time in our boat, going out at all hours of the day, and often at night time, under pretence of fishing. The people of the neighbourhood are accustomed to my peculiarities, and won't trouble themselves about us. I will take you to the scene of our labours, and we will make some soundings to ascertain the exact position of the wreck. Then some pleasant night, when everyone is in bed, we will put our apparatus into our boat. We will then go straight to the spot and anchor there."

"And do you fancy that after you have reached the bottom of the sea, you will only have to stoop and pick up the gold?"

"By no means. Mine will be no easy task. I must first find the chests, and then break them open."

"And you think you will be able to do this?"

"Certainly. I tried similar experiments at Whitstable, and had no trouble whatever. I can work with forty or fifty fathoms of water above my head, with as much ease as if I were on dry land. I shall fill a bag with gold, attach it to my belt, then ring, and you will draw me up to the surface. There is no difficulty about that. I can descend four or five times during the same night, and we can return home before daylight with all the gold our boat can carry. Now, do you still think my scheme impracticable?"

"Hum! whether it is practicable or not, I am as yet unable to say; but one might be tempted to try to carry it into execution. But how long do you think it will take to exhaust the gold mine?"

"Two or three months will probably be required, possibly three or four. If we are in too much of a hurry we sha'n't succeed."

"Let us say four or five months, then. That's too long for me. I have a treasure to guard here, and if I absented myself for any length of time, I should be very uneasy."

"Then you don't think twelve millions sufficient compensation for a short absence?"

"I didn't say that; but I want time for reflection. I suppose you have no intention of beginning work at once?"

"My dear friend, I am still very much in doubt about the most suitable season. In summer we should have calm and pleasant weather, and our task would be less difficult; but on the other hand, at that time of the year the coast is infested with sea-bathers and tourists, who might interfere with our operations."

"And recognise me, who am very well known in Paris."

"Exactly. While in the autumn or winter we should only meet the natives. But it might take us longer then, as there would often be storms to prevent us from going out in our boat. What do you say? I will abide by your decision."

Baron Matapan reflected some time before he made any response, but at last he said: "Giromon, I promise nothing, but even if I decided to engage in this enterprise I sha'n't begin operations at once."

"Very well. But when will you begin?"

"After I have had my revenge on the Calprenèdes," replied the baron. "I cannot leave Paris until the son has been brought before the Assizes. And now," he added, rising with a little difficulty, "do me the favour to

take yourself off. It is past ten o'clock, which is my hour for retiring, and I am terribly sleepy."

X.

THE day had seemed intolerably long to Doutrelaise. It had passed without his seeing anyone or hearing any news whatever. He had breakfasted alone at home, and had then dressed to go out, as he expected every moment to be summoned before the investigating magistrate, and he was anxious to give his testimony as soon as possible, so that he might atone for the imprudent disclosures which had caused Julien's arrest. He now bitterly regretted and anathematised the rash words which M. Matapan had taken such an unfair advantage of, for he could not close his eyes to the fact that all this trouble had been caused by the narrative of his midnight adventure and the exhibition of the opal. And his chagrin was the greater from the fact that he could no longer doubt but what he was known to be the accuser of Arlette's brother. What must that lovely young girl think of the unfortunate blunder her lover had committed? Her visit had slightly reassured him. He said to himself that if she had not forgiven the injury he had unintentionally done her brother, she wouldn't have come to show him a way to atone for it. For was it not a treaty of alliance that she had concluded with him by begging him to help her in saving Julien? And did not the means she had indicated prove that she had entire confidence in his discretion and devotion? It is true that she had also solicited the assistance of Jacques; but Jacques was an honourable man, utterly incapable of taking advantage of the opportunity to supplant his friend Doutrelaise. Besides, it did not seem at all probable that Jacques would play a prominent part in the salvation of young Calprenède. He himself admitted that he had no influence whatever over his brother; while Doutrelaise, on the contrary, had only to speak to convince M. Adrien de Courtaumer that Baron Matapan had strangely distorted the facts, that his accusation was based entirely upon an incident which he, Doutrelaise, now regarded in an entirely different manner, and that not merely was there nothing to prove that the person who had ascended the stairs at a quarter past twelve o'clock was Julien de la Calprenède, but that there were circumstances which rendered such a supposition extremely improbable. The man who had the necklace in his hand was both stronger and taller than Julien; and this was not the first time M. de la Calprenède's apartments had been entered at night.

However, to Albert's great surprise and disappointment, the anticipated summons did not come, although M. de Courtaumer's clerk had sent it with the summons to Baron Matapan. Unluckily, however, it was the doorkeeper, Marchefroid, who had received them both, and he had deemed it advisable to take them to his master.

The baron, who feared the effect of Doutrelaise's evidence, thereupon ordered his satellite to keep Albert's summons, and not deliver it until the following morning, hoping that this manœuvre would prevent the magistrate from listening to testimony which might exonerate young Calprenède, and that Doutrelaise's failure to appear would insure him a reprimand and prejudice the magistrate against him.

The first of these results was attained, and if he failed in the other it was no fault of his, for he could not foresee M. de Courtaumer's resignation. Albert did not receive the expected summons, but at six o'clock in the

evening he *did* receive a letter which he was not expecting, and which occasioned him a fresh disappointment. Jacques wrote that he could not dine with him, as his aunt insisted that he should spend the evening with her. He announced that his time would not be wasted by any means, as Madame de Vervins had a deal to tell him, and that he would be at liberty to join his friend before midnight, when he should bring some new and interesting information respecting Julien's case.

The first thought that occurred to Doutrelaise was that Jacques had deserted him, and if he had decided not to keep his promise, it could only be at the advice of his brother, transmitted through the marchioness, who had probably entreated her favourite nephew not to interest himself any further in a young fellow who was irrevocably lost. Doutrelaise forgot that Jacques was not a person to be easily persuaded, and, perhaps without being really conscious of the sentiments that influenced him, he was not altogether sorry to be deprived of his friend's assistance. The undertaking would be attended with greater difficulties, but the honour of success would belong entirely to himself. Arlette would be indebted to himself alone for the proof of Julien's innocence.

Doutrelaise dined at home alone and then dismissed his valet, who gladly availed himself of the opportunity to retire for the night. The young fellow then established himself in his smoking-room, which was admirably situated for watching the apartments both of the count and the baron. There was no light visible in the abode of either of them, and so he came to the conclusion that all the occupants of both floors had gone out—in which he was much mistaken, as M. Matapan was at that very moment holding an animated conversation with his old friend Giromon. At about ten o'clock Doutrelaise saw a light appear in the central room on each floor—the count's bed-chamber and the apartment in which the baron intended to sleep that night, Giromon having just left him after a long conference in the adjoining room, the stained-glass windows of which intercepted the light inside.

From these observations Doutrelaise came to the conclusion that M. de la Calprenède and Matapan had just returned home, and that the count was now talking with his daughter. All of a sudden, a ring at the door of his rooms made him start. The visitor could be none other than Jacques de Courtaumer, and Doutrelaise went to admit his friend. "I am delighted to see that I didn't wake your valet," exclaimed Madame de Vervins' nephew.

"I told him he need not trouble himself if any one did ring," said Albert. "I didn't wish him to see you; but I confess I had given you up."

"Why? You received my letter, didn't you?"

"Yes, but I thought that your aunt—"

"My aunt just went to bed, and I lost no time in getting here. Besides I am not late; as our operations cannot begin before midnight, we still have an hour to spare."

"An hour at least, for they are still up."

"So much the better, for it will take me at least an hour to tell you all I have just heard."

"Nothing good I am sure."

"Not particularly; but I do not despair. Have you anything to drink? My throat is dry from talking—and any cigars? I have smoked all day without going up to my rooms, and my case is empty."

"You will find all you want here."

"Perfect!" exclaimed Courtaumer, as they entered the smoking-roon. "This is certainly a comfortable place for a chat. Out of doors, there's a cold mist that chills one to the bone. Now, oblige me by explaining the meaning of those lights in the opposite wing. Whose is that brilliant one on the first floor?"

"Matapan's."

"And that subdued light on the third floor?"

"That window is in the count's bed-chamber."

"Then his room is directly over the baron's. Look, the old rascal has just extinguished his light!"

Doutrelaise hastened to the window, and saw that M. Matapan's light had indeed disappeared. "Yes," he murmured, "he has retired for the night no doubt."

"By the way," suddenly inquired Courtaumer, "why didn't you present yourself at the Palais de Justice?"

"I didn't go because I was not summoned," replied Albert, considerably surprised.

"Excuse me; my brother summoned you at the same time as he sent for Matapan, who lost no time in making his appearance."

"I assure you I received no summons, although I have been at home all day. I am exceedingly sorry that I failed to receive the message, for I might have mitigated the effect of Monsieur Matapan's assertions. Monsieur de Courtaumer has only heard the accuser, while if he had questioned me—"

"Console yourself. He won't have charge of the case."

"What! has he declined it? That is a bad omen. He has probably become convinced that Julien is guilty, and doesn't wish to be mixed up in the affair."

"That is about the situation; but my brother has done more than decline the case; he has sent in his resignation; and there must have been good reasons for him to do so, for I know that he is much attached to his profession."

"Then all is lost. My only hope was in his kindly sense of justice. The colleague who takes his place will probably be guided by appearances, and appearances are certainly against Julien. But what can have happened to induce your brother to take such a momentous step?"

"Something really very extraordinary. You recollect that Mademoiselle de la Calprenède told us this morning that her father had discovered the necklace in a room adjoining Julien's. I confess that the confession overwhelmed me with consternation, and I entirely forgot to ask her what had become of the accursed jewels. However it seems that yesterday evening the count took the necklace to my aunt, showed it to her, and asked her advice. You will never be able to guess the scheme she devised for extricating him from his dilemma?"

"She perhaps volunteered to return the article to its owner."

"Not exactly, but she took it to the Palais de Justice this morning, forced her way into Adrien's office, and after throwing the necklace on his desk, said substantially as follows: 'My dear nephew, here are the jewels claimed by Monsieur Matapan. The Count de la Calprenède has intrusted them to me, telling me in confidence that they were found in his son's room. Some one must have put them there to injure the young man. You are to return them to this fellow Matapan, and compel him to withdraw his complaint.'"

" And did your brother comply with his aunt's request ? "

" He absolutely refused to do so at first; and if you knew him, you would understand how much he must have suffered when he found himself obliged to choose between his duty and our aunt's favour. However he finally yielded to the persuasions of the only person who has any influence over him. When my aunt left him, he admitted the baron, showed him the necklace, and tried to convince him that it was advisable for him to let the prosecution drop. This Matapan absolutely refused to do. He even indulged in some impertinent insinuations which wounded my brother so deeply, that the conscientious fellow, as soon as the interview was over, carried the necklace to the clerk's office, and sent his formal resignation to the Keeper of the Seals. It was an act of heroism on his part, which my aunt doesn't fully appreciate. She has been trying to induce Adrien to retire from the service of the government for a long time past, and she thinks he has only done his duty in resigning ; but my amiable sister-in-law has had a terrible quarrel with him. She is exceedingly ambitious, and she said so much that poor Adrien was obliged to take refuge at my aunt's, where I dined and spent the evening with him."

" Then you know what Monsieur de Courtaumer thinks of Julien's case."

" He thinks it a very bad one. Indeed, he said that if Monsieur de la Calprenède was not convicted, the trial would be only a farce."

" And does Madame de Vervins share this opinion ? "

" On the contrary, she is firmly convinced that Julien is the victim of a conspiracy. There was an excited controversy between her and Adrien on this point ; and I must say that she presented some very strong arguments in Julien's defence. This among them : the principal evidence against the young man is, that he had in his possession yesterday a large sum of money which he pretends to have won at roulette. It being impossible for him to prove this fact, persons naturally suppose that this money was realised by the sale of the necklace. But this necklace was not sold, as it has been found in one of the count's apartments."

" That's evident. What reply did your brother make to that argument ? "

" None, but he persisted in his opinion. He is as obstinate as a mule. Still, what he thinks is of very little consequence, as he will have nothing more to do with the case."

" Did you say anything to Madame de Vervins about our scheme ? "

" I referred to it, but only vaguely. I assured her that I had not abandoned young Calprenède's cause, and gave her to understand that I had discovered a means of being of service to him, but I took good care not to take her into our confidence. If I had done so, it would have been necessary for me to tell her of Mademoiselle Arlette's visit, and the key she had given you, and my aunt would have been horrified. Besides, you are not in favour with her at this moment. The count considers you to be the cause of his misfortunes, and he has converted his old friend to the same opinion."

" But hasn't Madame de Vervins other reasons for disliking me ? " inquired Doutrelaise, with some hesitation.

" What ? She scarcely knows you."

" That is true ; but she has always intended you to marry Mademoiselle de la Calprenède."

" I'm not sure of that, though I am strongly inclined to think so. But the

brother's conduct isn't calculated to encourage any decent fellow to marry the sister."

"But if his innocence was established, Madame de Vervins might again be anxious for the match you have alluded to."

"What are you going to worry about next? My aunt can form all the plans she likes, but I am the person principally interested, and you know very well that I shall never try to supplant you. Besides, you will, perhaps, have an opportunity to reinstate yourself in the good graces of the people who are now hostile to you. If you succeed in capturing the real thief, I think all the Calprenèdes will have cause to thank you, and there will be no better way for them to testify their gratitude than to admit you into their family. But time is passing, my friend, and it seems to me the decisive moment is fast approaching. How are the signal lights opposite?"

"The light in the count's bedroom has been extinguished."

"Good! then he is asleep or going to sleep."

"And now there is a light in his daughter's room," exclaimed Doutrelaise, who had not once taken his eyes off the right wing of the house. Courtaumer rose, and was hastening to the window to convince himself of the fact, when Doutrelaise prevented him from doing so by saying: "Take care. If you go too near the window you will be seen."

"Who'll see me? Matapan is asleep, and Monsieur de la Calprenède also; and if Mademoiselle Arlette, who is still awake, should see me—or you, no great harm would be done. She must be thinking of us at this very moment, for she knows that the hour is approaching, and perhaps she would not be sorry to see that we are here."

"It isn't she, I fear.

"Who, then? The Bourleroys' rooms are all dark like Matapan's."

"But you forget that people who want to see without being seen, take good care to extinguish their lights. There is nothing to prove that some one on the third floor is not watching us. The Bourleroys of both sexes are quite capable of such an act."

"If they are not watching us from the staircase, that's all I ask."

"And now, my dear friend, I think it is time for you to repair to your hiding-place."

"I, too, think so, and I am ready."

"However, we ought to understand each other before we begin the campaign. Tell me how you mean to proceed, so that I may know what to do?" said Jacques.

"Oh, my plan is very simple. I am going to steal downstairs, cautiously open the door of Monsieur de la Calprenède's apartments, and creep softly along the passage leading to the study. It was there the necklace was found. It is considerably longer than it is wide, and has but one window—"

"Yes, the second from the angle."

"And three doors. One at the end, opposite the window, and opening into the passage—I shall enter by that; another opening into Monsieur de la Calprenède's chamber; and the third communicating with Julien's bedroom."

"Where shall you station yourself?"

"In an arm-chair in a corner near the door leading into the passage. I know the position of all the articles of furniture as well as I know the position of those in this smoking-room. I have often called on Julien, and he has always received me there. I can see the room now as plainly as if I

were in it. There are four chairs—two arm-chairs and two ordinary ones ; besides a low sofa. This last stands against the wall that separates the study from Julien's bed-chamber. The arm-chairs stand one to the right, the other to the left of the door ; the small chairs are at either end of a table covered with books and papers, in the middle of the room. Against the other partition there is a cabinet—”

“ In which the necklace was found—at least so I was informed by my aunt, who received her information from Monsieur de la Calprenède himself.”

“ That is a valuable bit of information, and corresponds with what I saw the night I met the man on the staircase.”

“ What did you see ?”

“ After reaching my room, I went to the window. I fancied the person I had met was Julien, and wished to make sure of the fact. I thought I should see a light in his room, but I was mistaken. However, it seemed to me I could see a form slowly passing the first window, and a moment afterwards this form reappeared near the window in the study, where it stooped—and the cabinet is in that very spot.”

“ The man stooped to open it, that's evident. But this doesn't prove that the person wasn't Julien.”

“ No, I even thought it was he, and that he was locking up some money he had won at the card-table, but I have changed my mind since.”

“ And how did this shadow-play end ?”

“ I grew tired of watching and went to bed.”

“ That's a pity. The performance might perhaps have become interesting. I think I am now sufficiently acquainted with the topography of the room in which you mean to operate, so suppose we return to our plan. You are going to seat yourself in one of the arm-chairs and wait. For how long shall we say ?”

“ Till three o'clock. That will be long enough for the first attempt.”

“ Besides, if you remain away any longer, I cannot promise you that I sha'n't fall asleep. Another point : you will dispense with a light, I suppose ?”

“ Certainly. If I have a light the man won't come in, or if he does, he will see me and fly off at once. I might, perhaps, discover who he is, but I shouldn't discover the object of his coming, while by remaining in darkness and allowing him to act—”

“ That's all very well ; but to detect him in the act, you must be able to see distinctly. A dark lantern is what you need, but I don't suppose you possess one.”

“ No, I don't.”

“ Then we will say no more about it. You can use a box of matches and a common candle instead.”

“ Yes, and now that we have said all that is necessary, I am going to my post. It is quite time.”

“ I will detain you no longer. But one last bit of advice. Don't forget that Mademoiselle de la Calprenède is not yet asleep. There is still a light in her window.”

“ You may rest assured that she won't close her eyes to-night.”

“ No more than we shall,” said Courtaumer, gaily. “ I am inclined to think that neither of us will persevere long in this undertaking, so let us hope that our first attempt will prove successful.”

“ Yes, we will hope so,” repeated Doutrelaise. “ Hope is the only con-

solation that is left me now ; but I have strong doubts of our success. I have the firmest belief in the truth of Julien's and Mademoiselle Arlette's statements concerning these nocturnal visits. What I saw the other night would convince me on this point, did I doubt their word ; but despite Mademoiselle Calprenède's presentiments, I scarcely believe that this man, whoever he may be, will venture to return into the count's apartments. He can have no earthly object in doing so now. If his design was, as I believe, to ruin Julien by abstracting Matapan's necklace and placing it in that cabinet, he has accomplished his purpose, and surely has no reason for another nocturnal prowl."

"Bah ! we'll see ; we shall triumph ultimately, I am sure of it. Go, my dear fellow, and I will watch here."

"But one word more before we separate. We have agreed upon a plan, but it is understood, is it not, that the details of its execution shall be left to the judgment of each of us ?"

"Of course ; and I am inclined to think that nothing we have predicted will come to pass."

"By the way, shall you take a revolver ?" added Jacques.

"That was my intention at first ; but I have since decided to go unarmed."

"Remember that we shall perhaps have to contend with a scoundrel armed to the teeth

"A pistol shot would arouse the entire household, and this man, who must live in the house, has every reason to desire to avoid capture in Monsieur de la Calprenède's apartments."

"That's true ; but he might use a poniard."

"I will run the risk of that," said Doutrelaise, resolutely. "I must incur some danger."

"Oh, I understand. You want Mademoiselle Arlette to know that you have risked your life to save her brother. Give yourself no further anxiety ; I will see that she is informed."

"Thank you ; but I should prefer her to discover the fact for herself."

With these words the conversation ended. Albert provided himself with all the necessary materials for striking a light at an instant's warning, and Jacques accompanied him as far as the landing. There they experienced no little satisfaction on finding that the gas had been extinguished. Absolute silence reigned in the hall, which was enshrouded in complete darkness. They shook hands before they separated, and Doutrelaise cautiously descended the stairs, while Courtaumer returned to the smoking-roon.

Albert held fast to the baluster as he went down—he had already drawn the key of M. de la Calprenède's apartment from his pocket—and he listened attentively, and paused some seconds upon each step. On reaching the seventh, he fancied he heard a door open below, and he hastily retreated to the wall. He trusted, for an instant, that the mystery was going to be solved sooner than he had even dared to hope. But he soon perceived that the door which had opened was on the third floor, and that some one had opened it, not to go in, but to come out. Somebody was stealthily leaving M. Bourleroy's apartments. "What if this midnight prowler should be one of the Bourleroys," thought Doutrelaise.

He was promptly enlightened on this point. By the flickering glimmer of a candle that suddenly became visible in the darkness, Doutrelaise per-

ceived the back of an individual who was cautiously descending the stairs, muffled in a fur-lined overcoat.

"Good heavens!" murmured Albert. "I believe it is Bourleroy—the old man. Where can he be going at this hour? To the Count de la Cal-prendre's apartments? That is impossible. Old Bourleroy is an idiot, but no thief. Still, I shall soon be satisfied on that point. He will soon reach the second floor. If he descends below it—which he is doing now—he intends to leave the house; for he certainly can't be going to pay Matapan a visit. Ah, I can guess now where he is bound! While his wife and daughter are asleep, he takes advantage of the opportunity to make his escape. He must be expected by the young lady we saw in that little brougham in the Champs-Elysées yesterday; and it is the virtuous Marchefroid who will open the door for him. Well, this caps the climax! But I will advance no further until after he has reached the street; for what if a fancy to retrace his steps should suddenly seize him?"

A familiar sound put a sudden end to these reflections—the tingling of the street-door bell, and at the same instant the flickering light gleaming intermittently in the darkness below altogether disappeared. "Monsieur Bourleroy plainly doesn't care to be seen by the person who just rang," said Albert to himself. "He will certainly come upstairs again, and I had better do the same."

He listened, however, before deciding to retire, and heard M. Bourleroy returning three steps at a time; then suddenly the sounds ceased, and a little reflection enabled Doutrelaise to understand why. The aged Lothario, who only wished to re-enter his domicile as a last resort, had conceived the idea of retreating into the doorway recess of the apartment on the second floor, and was waiting there until the person who had just rung showed himself, still intending to beat a retreat, if the new comer proved to be an occupant of one of the upper floors. M. Bourleroy knew all the inmates of the house, employers and servants alike, and he had only to lean over the balustrade to learn who the person was. Doutrelaise, who meant to adopt similar measures, remained upon the step where he had first paused.

The street door was banged to, and the ring of boot-heels resounded along the hall. "This new comer will take his candle, and I shall be able to discover who he is," thought Doutrelaise; but he was mistaken. The new arrival crossed the hall, and then his feet came in contact with the first step of the staircase. "He is coming up without any light," said Doutrelaise to himself, "exactly like the thief I met the other night. That's strange. What if he should be the man? And why not? There is certainly nothing to prove that he lives in the house."

The intruder had now begun to ascend the stairs. He did so slowly, often pausing and stumbling on his way. "One would fancy he was drunk," murmured Doutrelaise. "Really I no longer know what to think."

It was a strange situation. On this dark staircase, at an hour when honest folks are usually asleep, there were three men, two of them unconscious of the presence of any other person, and each of them upon a different flight. Doutrelaise was half-way between the third and fourth floors; M. Bourleroy was on the second landing, while the person who had just come in was climbing from the hall to the first one. Doutrelaise, consequently, had the twofold advantage of being able to see what was passing below, and of being in a position to avoid any unpleasant meeting, but he was nevertheless terribly excited. His heart beat loudly, and he asked himself in a

fever of anxiety how all this would end. The elder Bourleroy gave no sign of life, though the new-comer was gradually drawing nearer to him. Doutrelaise, who knew the staircase well, and who had very keen ears, soon realised that the intruder had reached the first landing, and that he had paused there. "So it is Ali just returning home," he thought. "I shall discover nothing this evening."

But he was again mistaken. After a short rest in front of the baron's door, the new-comer continued the ascent, but more slowly than before. And now it was within the range of possibility that he intended entering the count's apartment.

"What will happen when he reaches that landing?" wondered Albert. "Bourleroy is there. He doesn't move, although he can't be at all easy in mind; and he had better shrink as far back as possible in his corner, for if this man intends to enter the count's rooms, they are almost certain to come into collision with each other. Bourleroy, who isn't at all brave, will certainly call for help, if the man seizes hold of him. What shall I do in that case? Shall I go to his assistance? Certainly. Not because I am particularly interested in him, but because I don't want the scoundrel I am watching to escape. Cowardly as Bourleroy is, he will be of some assistance in capturing the rascal, and when I once get hold of him I'll compel him to explain."

The sound of the new comer's footsteps had again ceased. He could be heard breathing heavily once or twice; and then there was a profound silence.

"He's getting ready to open the door," thought Albert. "He's probably feeling in his pocket for the key. He must be so close to Bourleroy that he could touch him if he stretched out his hand. I shall soon know now—"

"Who the devil are you?" suddenly growled a voice that Doutrelaise fancied he recognised.

"Let me alone! don't touch me!" responded M. Bourleroy.

A profound silence followed this exclamation from the aged Lothario, Doutrelaise had not lost a syllable of this dialogue but he was as much in doubt as before. That Bourleroy, senior, was frightened did not surprise him in the least. He knew the man, and had anticipated the scene; but the conduct of the other individual astonished him. The thief he had encountered on the staircase a couple of nights previously had not conducted himself in this manner; instead of questioning Doutrelaise he had remained silent, and after a short struggle had proceeded on his way.

There was now nothing for Doutrelaise to do but await the conclusion of this interesting dialogue, and he did so—not for long however—for twenty seconds perhaps—and then a bright light illuminated the staircase—the light of one of those English matches the importation of which into France is forbidden, but which are so superior to the French ones despite the strong smell of sulphur they emit. To Doutrelaise the possession of a match of this kind seemed almost proof positive that the man who had lighted it was a foreigner like Matapan. However this illusion was of short duration, for the flaring match held out at arm's length by the new comer revealed to Albert's astonished eyes a face that he well knew, that of Anatole Bourleroy, who at once exclaimed: "Well, this is a good joke! So it's you, papa!"

"So it is you, you ne'er-do-well!" rejoined M. Bourleroy, senior, in the same breath.

"Ne'er do well, indeed!" growled Anatole. "I think I can return the compliment. I come home at a quarter past twelve—certainly not an unheard-of hour for returning—but certainly an unheard-of hour for going out."

"I, too, was just coming in," stammered the father.

"Bah! you spent the evening at home with the commission merchant who aspires to the honour of becoming your son-in-law. Don't try to deny it. Herminie told me that her suitor was expected to tea this evening. So what are you up to now, papa?"

"That is none of your business."

"Possibly, but it is some of mamma's, I fancy. I'll have a talk with her, not this evening, for she must be in bed, but to-morrow morning—and I shall ask her if—"

"You will do nothing of the kind. If you say a single word to her, I shall stop your allowance."

"There would be no fun about that, certainly. But I say, papa, haven't you a candle to lend me? I have just used my last match, and have already narrowly escaped breaking my neck at the foot of the baron's staircase. I never can find my candle in the vestibule. I believe that rascal of a porter steals it to give to his daughter."

"Will you hold your tongue, you scapegrace? You are drunk."

"Drunk? Nothing of the kind. The two bottles of port and the dozen glasses of champagne I took are not enough to upset me. I was at the Rubicon, where I dropped in—"

"Enough: go up stairs. I've no desire to spend the night in listening to your foolishness."

"Are you coming up too?"

"Certainly, as I was just returning when you overtook me."

"That's another fib," muttered Anatole, junior, who did not appear convinced by any means. "I say, papa, I lost three thousand francs to-night. I should be very much obliged to you if you would give me the money to pay them."

"I!" exclaimed M. Bourleroy. "I would rather cut my right hand off than take any money out of my safe for such a purpose. It would only encourage you in your dissipation."

"Dissipation is rather strong. If I had lost my money at *baccarat* I shouldn't have ventured to ask you for it; but *piquet* is a game which even the heads of families may indulge in. Look here, now, papa, I ask you for the second and last time, will you give me one hundred and fifty napoleons."

"Not one hundred and fifty francs!"

"Very well. Then I will ask mamma for the money as soon as she opens her eyes in the morning; and, as she will refer me to you, I shall be obliged to tell her that you refused my request—on the Count de la Calprenède's staircase."

The scene was becoming ludicrous, and Doutrelaise, who was still listening, would have laughed heartily had he only been less anxious. The Bourleroys might come up at any moment, and Albert did not wish them to find him perched upon their staircase. So he decided to retreat a little, and had hardly done so when he heard this doleful exclamation: "You want to ruin me!"

"Pshaw, papa, don't talk such nonsense as that. Any one would think you were as hard up as old Calprenède, but a paltry hundred and fifty

louis ! why, you would never miss them ! To think that after making a fortune of several millions in the drug business, you might be obliged to give up your pretty little duckie for want of three thousand francs ! Still, if you choose, we will allow mamma to be the judge."

" You rascal !" exclaimed M. Bourleroy, to appease his anger, and then, in a different tone, he added : " I yield, but this will be the last time. I am altogether too indulgent, and if your mother knew it she would scold me roundly."

" She will never know it," was Anatole's quick response. " Then I am to have the three thousand francs to-morrow morning ? "

" Before noon ; but go on. If I remain any longer on this staircase I shall catch a frightful cold."

Anatole did not compel his father to repeat this order. The stairs began to creak under his heavy, uncertain tread, and his father followed him, sneezing loudly. " Pleasant dreams, papa !" was Anatole's parting salutation. " By the way, if you want to go out, you certainly ought not to deny yourself the pleasure."

His father only replied to this jest by a growl, and they reached the third landing together. They did not again light any matches, and Doutrelaise was not obliged to conceal himself. He heard their door softly open and close again with a feeling of keen satisfaction. At last, he was rid of the Bourleroys, and sole master of this staircase so fertile in surprises.

But he had no time to lose. The father might make a fresh attempt to leave the house as soon as his son was asleep, and Anatole, who was deeply intoxicated, would certainly not lose any time in retiring to bed. Accordingly Doutrelaise did not hesitate, though he no longer entertained much hope of discovering the mysterious intruder. He slowly descended to the second floor, and then paused again to listen. He only heard the heavy rumbling of vehicles passing along the Boulevard Haussmann, and the hoarse notes of a cuckoo-clock in the doorkeeper's room. The bird croaked but once, and Doutrelaise was not sorry to learn that it was only half-past twelve. " There is still time," he murmured, " and this night may yet prove an eventful one in my life."

XI.

ALBERT DOUTRELAISE now drew from his pocket the key Arlette had intrusted to him, and if he had felt tempted to abandon his rather dangerous undertaking, the recollection of the girl he loved would have strengthened his faltering resolution. He felt for the lock, found it, and cautiously opened the door ; then entered a passage and closed the door softly behind him.

He was familiar with the arrangement of the rooms, and reached the door of Julien's bed-room without any serious difficulty. As the long passage was very dark, and as he was afraid of coming in contact with anything and thus making a noise that might rouse the count, he decided to make his way to the study through Julien's bedchamber, in which he could dimly distinguish the various articles of furniture, thanks to the window overlooking the courtyard. At this moment the thought occurred to him, what should he do if the count were not asleep, or if he woke up and discovered him surreptitiously introducing himself into his domicile ? Explain why he had come ? But that was more easily said than done. Besides, the count

might refuse to listen ; for even if he did not take him for a thief, he might reasonably impute even more dishonourable intentions to him. Doutrelaise failed to find any satisfactory response to the question he had mentally propounded, and consoled himself with the hope that he would escape this frightful dilemma.

Julien's bed-room was exactly as he had left it. The bed, which had not been occupied the night before, was smooth and unruffled. Garments were lying about on the chairs ; the tables were covered with books and papers, and several pistols and swords hung on the wall opposite the marble mantel-shelf, upon which a number of boxes of cigars were piled. The door communicating with the study was wide open, a fact which caused Doutrelaise unalloyed satisfaction. There was one less difficulty to be overcome ; for a lock does not always act noiselessly ; and the nearer he approached the count's bed-chamber, the more he dreaded any noise. Before proceeding any further, Doutrelaise glanced up at his own rooms on the fourth floor, and was pleased to see that Jacques had taken the advice he had given him before he had separated. All the lights had disappeared. But on looking more attentively, he perceived that although Jacques had extinguished the lamp and candles, he had not extinguished the fire, and the reflection of the fitful glare that arose from the wood blazing on the hearth shone ever and anon upon the window panes. And this discovery, which annoyed Doutrelaise not a little, led to another that greatly surprised him. A form was distinctly visible, not at the window of the smoking-room, but at the further window, directly opposite Mademoiselle de la Calprenède's bed-chamber, and commanding a view of both floors. "What is Jacques doing there ?" wondered Albert. "He is not watching for me ; he is watching her ; probably her light is still burning. He is thinking of her, and yet he solemnly assured me that he did not love her." For a moment he was strongly tempted to return to his rooms and have an explanation with Courtaumer ; but this would have been the height of folly, and his paroxysm of jealousy soon abated. "I have lost my senses," he said to himself. "Jacques cannot be a false friend ; he is the soul of honour. Why should I trouble myself about such a trifle ?" And thereupon he cautiously advanced towards the study in which he was to secrete himself.

There, too, everything was in its accustomed place, and he had made no mistakes when he described the arrangement of the room to Jacques. The small cabinet was directly opposite him, at the precise spot where he had seen the stranger pause a few nights before. This was the point to watch, but he must not remain too near it under penalty of failing in his object. Thereupon he turned to the right, made his way cautiously through the rather scantily furnished room, and succeeded in reaching the arm-chair near the door opening into the corridor, the one which he had previously announced his intention of occupying. He first satisfied himself that the chair was perfectly steady, that it would bear his weight without creaking, and he then seated himself in it. His vigil had begun, and it might be a long one. He armed himself with patience, and sat as erect and motionless as a statue.

His hiding-place could not have been better chosen, for the room was hereabouts veiled in shadow, while near the cabinet it was dimly illumined by the light that stole in through the window. Doutrelaise therefore had a chance to see without being seen, supposing anything occurred. He had not been there twenty minutes when he heard the clock in the adjoining

room strike one, and just at that moment his keen ear detected an almost inaudible sound.

Hearing is a sense which often acquires extraordinary acuteness, but which cannot always be depended upon. Doutrelaise was one of those persons of whom it is sometimes said that they can hear the grass grow. No sound escaped him, however slight it might be, and on account of the remarkable development of this faculty, he was frequently deceived respecting the causes that produced these sounds. For this reason, he was inclined to distrust himself, and he wondered if he had not mistaken one of these inexplicable cracking noises which so often break the silence of night in an apartment, for approaching footsteps. Was it the introduction of a key into a lock which had just caused that faint, grating sound? Or had the noise been produced by the count as he turned in his bed in a room which was only separated from Doutrelaise by a thin partition? He waited, preparing himself for any event.

Only a few seconds later the noise, which had ceased for an instant, became more audible, and could no longer be mistaken. The front door opened, then closed again. "At last I shall know if Julien told the truth," murmured Albert. He held his breath and pressed his right hand to his heart to still its throbings. On entering the study he had had the presence of mind not to close the door leading into Julien's chamber, and the road was therefore clear.

A slow and heavy tread made the flooring creak, in spite of the carpet that was spread over it. Doutrelaise, who was a great reader, thought of a scene in "*La Vénus d'Ille*," Mérimée's wonderful story, in which the Venus (a bronze statue) becomes endowed with life, and appears at mid night to disturb the slumbers of a bride. But that was only a novelist's romantic fancy, and the man who was now advancing was no statue, although apparently of colossal size. He had now reached the threshold of the study, and paused there for a moment.

Doutrelaise sat silent and motionless in his corner, and as nearly as he could distinguish in the partial darkness, this mysterious intruder was clad in a priestly robe which enveloped his entire person, the hood concealing even his face. Whence came this colossus, and what had brought him into the count's rooms? Thieves are not in the habit of arraying themselves in such a manner when they are going to rob a safe, for they would not only frighten people by their strange garb, but the latter might hamper their movements considerably if they were discovered. Whatever this man's intentions might be, it was evident that he belonged to the house, for when a person desires to enter an occupied dwelling, he does not run about the streets in a monk's costume. But if he belonged to the house, which of its occupants could he possibly be? "I shall be able to see better when he passes the window," thought Arlette's lover.

But the mysterious visitor did not appear to be in any hurry to do this. He remained standing in the doorway, with head thrown back and hands extended, in the attitude which the blind generally assume when they are trying to find their way. He evidently did not intend to use a light, and Doutrelaise, who could easily have furnished him with one, as he had both candle and matches in his pocket, did not feel at all inclined to do him this favour, as darkness was a great advantage to him under the circumstances.

After waiting for a short time, the man walked straight on, with a quiet, dragging step. His movements were of automatic regularity, and his rigid arms seemed to be trying to seize hold of some invisible object.

"Where is he going?" Doutrelaise asked himself, amazed at this strange sight. "If he continues advancing in that direction, he will come into collision with the door of the room where the count is sleeping, he will awake him, and who knows but what he will kill him!" At that moment Doutrelaise bitterly regretted that he had not armed himself in accordance with Jacques de Courtaumer's advice. Anything would be better than to allow Arlettes' father to be assassinated, and he resolved to make good use of his fists in the absence of a revolver or dagger.

But the man did not advance further. Having passed the embrasure formed by the window, he turned his face to the wall and his back to Doutrelaise, who was thinking: "Yes, that is the very spot where I saw the figure pause the other night. What is he doing? He is stooping, stooping lower yet. One would think he were going to kneel. My God! it is a madman!"

In fact, it did seem impossible to explain this nocturnal visitor's strange conduct in any other way. The fact of his forcing an entrance into any other person's rooms, in the dead of night, merely for the purpose of praying on bended knees, seemed a sufficiently conclusive proof of his insanity. Nevertheless, Doutrelaise still doubted, and he was right, for he soon perceived that this genuflection was for an entirely different purpose. The stranger's hands were eagerly fumbling in the darkness, and soon a harsh, grating noise announced that his task was accomplished. A spring had been touched; and the result was that a panel in the wall slowly moved downwards. Doutrelaise divined this rather than saw it, for it took place in the darkest corner of the room. A new idea flashed through his mind. "There must be a receptacle for valuables there," he thought, "this man knows of its existence, and comes occasionally at night to visit it. Does he do so to satisfy himself that it is undisturbed, or to lay violent hands on the treasures it contains, and to empty it gradually, taking one bag of gold, or one jewel after another away with him? Is this person a thief, or is he the owner of the hidden treasure?"

Doutrelaise did not know what to think, and resolved to wait for the finish of this incomprehensible scene. The kneeling man had both his head and his hands in the cavity, and he seemed to be actively engaged in collecting or arranging its contents. This operation lasted for a couple of minutes, which seemed very long to Doutrelaise. Then another spring snapped, and the panel slowly resumed its former position. The machinery must have been used very often, for it acted quickly and easily. As soon as the hiding-place was closed again, the stranger rose, turned to the left, and started to leave the room as he had entered it.

It was time for Doutrelaise to decide upon his course of action. What he had just seen, explained but a part of the mystery. A person undeniably entered the apartments at night: he had a key to them, and was acquainted with their secrets. That point was settled; and it was of no little importance, for it might serve to prove that the opal necklace had not been carried into this room by Julien, but by some one else. But who was this stranger? That was a point of vast importance. Still, the idea of stopping him before he left the room, was not to be entertained for a moment, as a struggle between them would certainly awaken M. de la Calprenède. On the other hand, it would not do to allow the man to escape, and Albert realised the necessity of capturing him as soon as he reached the staircase.

It was then that he for the first time realised the wisdom of Courtaumer's plan of hovering occasionally about the staircase. "Provided he has

carried it into execution," he thought, as he cautiously followed the hooded monk who was leaving the room with measured steps, "we two can easily accomplish what I shouldn't be able to achieve alone."

Doutrelaise regulated his pace by that of the mysterious visitor, and he was still in Julien's bed-chamber, when the intruder opened the door leading from the corridor to the staircase. As he did so, Doutrelaise perceived a faint light. All doubts were dispelled ; Jacques was there. Doutrelaise hastily sprang forward to reach his friend in time ; but as he was crossing the dark corridor, a powerful hand caught him by the collar. Stupefied by this unexpected assault, which could not come from the man in the robe, as he was already upon the landing, Albert made a violent effort to release himself ; but the hand which had seized him held him in a vice-like grasp. "Ah ! so it is you who enter my rooms at night-time," cried the assailant. "Don't try to escape me, rascal ! If you do, I will blow your brains out."

Doutrelaise was overwhelmed with consternation, for he recognised the Count de la Calprenède's voice, and understood what had occurred. Arlette's father had not been asleep, or he had been roused from his slumbers. He had heard a noise in the study, and to cut off the intruder's retreat, had hastened along the dark passage to the door leading to the staircase. He reached it a little too late. The culprit had passed out, but the watcher was still there, and the watcher had been caught.

"Who are you, scoundrel ?" demanded M. de la Calprenède, shaking his prisoner vigorously.

"You are mistaken, sir," said Albert. "I am not the thief. I am your neighbour, Doutrelaise."

"You !" exclaimed the count, even more angry than surprised, "you here—and at this hour ? What is your business ; and how did you gain an entrance ?"

"I will tell you, sir. I will explain everything, and you will admit that I had only the best intentions, but I entreat you to speak lower."

"Do you dare to impose silence upon me ?"

"At least release me—a moment's delay may ruin everything. Your son's honour is at stake. I may be able to save it, but if you detain me—"

"My son ! You dare to speak of my son, you who so basely slandered him, and caused all his misfortune."

"But if it can be proved that he's innocent, and if he is set at liberty tomorrow, you will owe it to me. If you doubt what I say, open this door, and you will see some one in whom you have confidence, my friend, Jacques de Courtaumer, or at least he was there a moment ago. But if you refuse to open the door, he will perhaps pay with his life for the service we have just rendered you."

"Jacques de Courtaumer," repeated the count, who was not prepared to hear this name fall from Doutrelaise's lips.

"Yes, I was waiting outside this door for the man who had entered your apartments—and who is either a thief or an enemy—and Jacques is now face to face with the scamp, but I don't hear his voice. Heaven only knows what has happened !"

This was true ; Jacques gave no sign, and yet Doutrelaise was certain that he had seen a light on the staircase—a light that Jacques alone could have brought with him. How did it happen then that there was no indication of a struggle or, at least, an exciting dialogue between his friend and the mysterious individual who had just gone out ? Doutrelaise explained the situation so clearly, and spoke in such resolute tones, that M. de la

Calprenède instantly recovered his composure. The scene had taken place in complete darkness, the count not having tarried to provide himself with a candle, although he had taken a revolver. He had released Doutrelaise as soon as he mentioned his name, but had placed himself in front of him in such a manner as to bar his passage, and poor Albert dared not lay violent hands upon Arlette's father.

"Give me your word of honour that Jacques de Courtaumer is outside that door," said M. de la Calprenède, suddenly.

"I swear that if he isn't, that man has killed him : and if he has, the man has fled. We shall have no proof, and your son will be lost."

The count did not reply, but he opened the door and beheld a strange scene. The man attired as a monk was standing on the stairs as motionless as a statue ; one might have supposed he had suddenly turned to stone. A few steps below was Jacques, with a lighted candle in his right hand. "Thank God ! they are still there," murmured Doutrelaise, although he did not understand the scene in the least.

He stepped forward, however, and M. de la Calprenède followed his example. The stranger did not move ; but Jacques, who had just perceived the count and Albert, checked them by a gesture which plainly implied, "Watch ; but allow me to act."

They could not refuse to obey this mute injunction ; so they retreated slightly, and gazed intently at the strange scene. Jacques waved his candle gently, and the man, as if attracted by the light, began to descend the stairs.

But, at the first step he took he encountered a living obstacle. Jacques barred the way, and had no sooner touched this strange being than the latter remounted the stairs, instead of trying to force his way past. His tall form and broad shoulders were now plainly visible, but not his face, which was still half hidden by the hood of a garment which Doutrelaise had taken for a monk's robe, but which proved to be one of those woollen mantles with bright stripes, worn by the Arabs of Syria. Jacques now advanced and touched him gently. The man recoiled ; whereupon Jacques placed himself beside him, shoulder to shoulder, and then the stranger immediately turned towards the doorway whence he had emerged ten minutes before. After motioning the count and Doutrelaise aside, Courtaumer placed himself behind the stranger and gave him a slight push. The eccentric promenader then began to walk straight on before him. The door was still open, and without the slightest hesitation and without turning he entered the count's apartments. Albert and M. de la Calprenède watched these movements in complete bewilderment, not daring either to speak or move. "Come !" whispered Jacques de Courtaumer, and they followed him mechanically.

Doutrelaise began to understand that Jacques meant to make a prisoner of the mysterious intruder, but he did not yet understand why the man allowed himself to be guided with so much docility. The count was completely in the dark, and was only silent because he trusted Courtaumer as much as he distrusted Doutrelaise.

Meanwhile the man in the mantle was slowly crossing Julien's bed-chamber, and soon he reached the study. Courtaumer, who was behind him, gently closed the door and cautiously turned the key in the lock. Then, addressing M. de la Calprenède, he said : "Go to the door leading into the passage and to the one communicating with your bed-chamber. They can be locked on the outside, I suppose ?"

"Yes," stammered the count, "but—"

"Quick, I tell you. The bird is caged; don't let him make his escape again. He cannot get out on this side, and I will go with you to hasten operations." Thereupon he ran into the passage, dragging the count after him.

In the twinkling of an eye he had turned the key of the second door, and M. de la Calprenède went on to his bed-chamber to lock the third. "Now we can talk," said Jacques, when these precautions had been completed. "Let us go back to Julien's room, please." He had assumed command, and no one thought of contesting his authority. When the party had regained the first room, he deposited his candle on the mantelshelf, and said, in a low tone: "Count, your son will be set at liberty to-morrow morning. We have the man, who placed the opal necklace in your cabinet, in custody."

"Yes; but I can't understand why he should have allowed himself to be captured without resistance," murmured Doutrelaise.

"Didn't you see that he was asleep—that he is a somnambulist? He may remain in his present condition for several hours."

"Is that really so? Did you see his face?"

"I should think I did."

"Do you know him?"

"We all know him. It is Matapan."

"What, Matapan!" exclaimed the count and Doutrelaise in the same breath.

"Yes, Matapan," responded Jacques, quietly. "And he is asleep. I had been making him turn round and round on the landing for five minutes or so when you appeared. This isn't the first time I have seen persons in a similar condition. We had a somnambulist among the sailors on board the 'Juno.' He would work at the capstan, climb the rigging and descend without waking, and, what is still more wonderful, he could hear orders and execute them."

"Matapan!" repeated M. de la Calprenède, in amazement. "And he enters my apartment without knowing what he is doing! Impossible!"

"You forget that he occupied these rooms for a long time. No doubt he kept a key of the door, intentionally or unintentionally, it matters little which, and in his sleep he unconsciously returns here. He has been here a dozen, twenty times, perhaps. The other night, for instance, my friend Doutrelaise met him on the stairs; he dealt him a vigorous blow in the darkness, and yet Matapan didn't wake up. He continued on his way and quietly entered your apartments."

"Then it was he who brought the necklace here?"

"There is no doubt of it, count."

"But why did he bring it?"

"Oh, that's easily explained. The man is a miser. He hoards gold, precious stones, and valuables of every description in his rooms. Of course, he was in the habit of doing the same thing when he occupied the apartments he has since let to you. Now somnambulists act in their sleep as they act when they are awake, with this exception, that they don't reason. Their actions are merely the result of habit. Consequently, a miserly somnambulist goes to visit his treasures. He handles his gold, caresses it, and sometimes moves it from one hiding-place to another. I once heard at Brest the story of a man who spent the night in going from his bedroom to the cellar to conceal there some bags of gold he possessed, and being asleep all the while. The cellar had a trap-door that fastened with a spring lock."

One night he shut himself in so securely that he was unable to force his way out, and starved to death there. His bones were found I know not how many years afterwards.

"I am perfectly satisfied that this is a similar case. It is evident that Monsieur Matapan, in his fits of somnambulism, carried his valuables from one place to another. This explains how he came to deposit the opal necklace in the place where you found it."

"Which was a small cabinet near my bedroom door."

"There is probably a similar article of furniture in one of his own rooms, and he undoubtedly thought he was locking the necklace up in it. Perhaps he returned to look for it the following night, to take it home again—and didn't find it."

"Then he is not conscious of his acts?"

"Oh, not at all, when he is in this cataleptic slumber."

"And when he wakes up?"

"He has not the slightest recollection of what has occurred."

"Then he was sincere in his charge against my son?"

"I think so; I may even say that I am certain of it. Still, that does not alter the fact that his conduct has been dastardly in the extreme. He took advantage of a series of most unfortunate coincidences to satisfy the hatred which he seems to entertain for you, but he does not suspect that he himself committed the theft."

"And yet he can't be ignorant that he is a somnambulist."

"Yes; perhaps so. Remember that he lives alone, and that it isn't at all likely anyone has ever before seen him in this state, as he entertains no company."

"No one visits him in the evening, and his servant usually retires very early," remarked Doutrelaise. "So it is not at all strange if he should be a somnambulist without knowing it, for if no one has ever seen him in this condition, no one could warn him."

"This is a matter of minor importance," said M. de la Calprenède. "Let us give our attention to the present situation. You have locked him up, but he will soon awake. Perhaps he has already done so."

"No indeed; an attack of this kind usually lasts for several hours, and it is only a few moments since he left his room. He will now repeat whatever he has already done—probably open some article of furniture and search for something. Afterwards he will doubtless endeavour to leave as he came. Hush! he is already attempting to do so." M. de la Calprenède started. "Yes he is trying to open the door," remarked Jacques. "He has found the lock, but he won't find the key, as it is on this side. You understand now why I wanted to lock the doors."

"Yes; but this state of affairs cannot be prolonged indefinitely."

"It will be prolonged until it terminates in a revelation which will be satisfactory to everyone excepting Matapan himself."

"Pardon me, sir," said the count, greatly agitated. "I am deeply grateful for the interest you take in my son's vindication, and the zeal you display under such strange circumstances—so strange that I still fail to understand how you, and especially Monsieur Doutrelaise, found yourselves in my apartments, but I am even less able to understand what advantage you hope to derive from establishing the fact that Monsieur Matapan is a somnambulist."

"His presence here proves that Julien is innocent."

"Proves it in a manner satisfactory to you and me, undoubtedly, but

Monsieur Matapan will deny it, and deny it honestly. You, yourself, told me that when he woke up he would remember nothing of what had passed."

"That is true ; but if he wakes up in the presence of witnesses he won't be able to deny it."

"In the presence of witnesses ! You would summon the other occupants of the house ? Do not think of such a thing, sir. The inmates of this house are all hostile to me and mine."

"Not all of them," rejoined Jacques, glancing at Doutrelaise, who had made up his mind to play a silent part. The count was prejudiced against him, and it would certainly be better to allow Jacques to do the talking ; but for all that, he thought the count's objection very sensible, and waited with some anxiety to hear what Jacques would say in response.

"I foresaw this emergency," said the ex-lieutenant. "Not that I suspected Matapan was a somnambulist ; I confess that this possibility never once occurred to me. But since yesterday, D'utrelaise and I have been trying to find out what we could do for your son, who, we are satisfied, has been unjustly accused."

"In your opinion, perhaps, but I think that Monsieur Doutrelaise—"

"You are mistaken, sir. Your son has no warmer defender than my friend, Albert, and it is through the information which he furnished, that I succeeded in devising a plan which will lead, I firmly believe, to Julien's complete vindication. We knew that a man had entered your rooms several times, and we suspected that this man was the thief, so we resolved to lie in wait for him and capture him. I was to watch on the staircase, and Doutrelaise was to wait inside."

"I should like to know how Monsieur Doutrelaise succeeded in opening the door of my apartments ?" interrupted M. de la Calprenède.

"That will be explained, sir," was Jacques' quick reply, "but the moments are precious now, so allow me to state as briefly as possible what I intend to do, and then let me go in search of the commissary of police who arrested your son."

"The commissary of police who arrested my son !" repeated M. de la Calprenède. "You expect him to establish Julien's innocence ? You forget that he has been his bitterest accuser. I have your brother's authority for that."

"It is true," said Jacques, "that the commissary in question was at first of opinion that Julien was guilty. There are plenty of persons who shared this belief, and I admit that even I, at first, had my doubts. I was with your son when he was arrested, and I accompanied him to the dépôt, and I confess that his replies did not seem very satisfactory to me. However my opinion like that of the commissary has changed. He told me himself that his views were modified."

"What ? Have you seen him again ?" exclaimed Doutrelaise.

"I spent an hour with him before coming here, and if I failed to inform you of the matter, it was only because I had so many other things to tell you. He received me very cordially ; and I told him many things which he was quite ignorant of, among others, that the stolen necklace had just been deposited in the registrar's office. As Julien was suspected of having stolen or pawned it, this was important news, and seemed to change his opinion considerably. Then I told him everything ; informed him that Monsieur Matapan was a very mysterious personage, and that he had a grudge against the Calprenède family. I also reminded him of what Julien had said during our drive—that some one had entered his room several

times at night—and added that one of my friends, who lived in the house, intended to watch and detect the intruder, if possible, and that I proposed to assist him. He told me he should be very happy to be convinced of these singular nocturnal promenades; so I asked him to tell me how and where I could find him, in case I needed his assistance. He told me, and now I have only to summon him."

"But he must be in bed by this time," murmured Monsieur de la Calprenède.

"He will be in twenty-five minutes. However, being an unmarried man, he spends his evenings at a small club in the Rue Miromesnil, but a short distance from here. I still have a cab waiting for me outside. Will you allow me to take Albert with me?"

"Monsieur Doutrelaise is master of his own actions," replied Arlette's father, coldly. "Still I desire him to return. I have an explanation to ask of him."

"He will give it, count, but let us lose no more time now. Matapan is still wandering about trying to find his way out. You need feel no anxiety about him as long as he continues asleep, but he will wake up sooner or later, and it would be advisable for the commissary to be present when that occurs.

"Come, my dear fellow," said Jacques, dragging his friend towards the door.

M. de la Calprenède made no further attempt to detain them, and they hastened down the stairs. However, their departure from the house was considerably retarded by Marchefroid, who compelled them to repeat their names several times, before he would open the door.

They were also obliged to wake up the driver of Courtaumer's cab who was sound asleep on his box, but Jacques soon accomplished this by shaking him vigorously. The two friends seated themselves in the vehicle, which at once rolled away. Doutrelaise was bewildered by so many strange revelations, but Courtaumer seemed to be in his element, and rubbed his hands enthusiastically. "Ah, well! what do you think of my tactics now?" he cried, and then he added:

"Wasn't I right to insist upon watching on the staircase?"

"If it hadn't been for you the attempt would have proved a failure," replied Albert. "Matapan would have escaped, or he would have woken up elsewhere than in the count's apartments, and I should have been unable to prove that he had entered them."

"While now that we have him in custody, we are sure of worsting him. But tell me, did the count put in an appearance while you were watching?"

"No, not until I was about to follow Matapan. He probably heard my footsteps and ran out into the passage, where he collared me. Fortunately, I had seen Matapan open the door, so I assured the count that you were there, and he consented to see. I repeat that the credit of saving Julien, if he should be saved, will belong entirely to you."

"Have no fears, my dear fellow. I will arrange matters so that you shall have all the credit in the eyes of your divinity. By the way, Arlette's father is ignorant that it was she who gave you the key, is he not?"

"He will always remain ignorant of it, I hope. At all events, I certainly sha'n't tell him."

"Nor shall I. We must invent some story if he insists upon an explanation. We can tell him, for instance, that you met Matapan at the door and stole in after him. We mustn't betray Mademoiselle de la Calprenède's

secret. She will probably confess everything to her father on the day she marries you."

"That day will never come," said Doutrelaise despondently.

"Bah! I regard your marriage as an accomplished fact. I shall assist you as much as I can, and shall also persuade my aunt to espouse your cause. But here we are! I have but one fear: that the commissary may have been called elsewhere. Is the house still lighted up? Yes; I shall be back in a moment: so wait for me here in the cab."

As he spoke Jacques opened the door, sprung from the vehicle while it was still in motion, and hastened into the house. Doutrelaise, left alone, tried to collect his thoughts; but he had little time for reflection, for Jacques returned almost immediately with the commissary, whom he hustled into the cab, and the next moment they were driving rapidly towards the Boulevard Haussmann.

"Let me introduce my friend, Monsieur Doutrelaise," said Jacques. "He occupies the fourth floor of Monsieur Matapan's house."

"I know," replied the commissary; "it is the gentleman who met the plaintiff yesterday. Are you sure that the somnambulist is Baron Matapan?"

"Perfectly sure. But you will have an opportunity to see for yourself."

"And I will question him closely, I promise you. I have always had my suspicions concerning that man. The origin of his fortune has always been shrouded in mystery."

"He may have been a pirate. I know that one of his friends was."

"I will mention that fact in my report. I shall be very glad if, without neglecting my duty, I can do anything to oblige the brother of a magistrate for whom I entertain the greatest respect."

"My brother Adrien is no longer a magistrate; he sent in his resignation this evening."

"That is bad news."

"It was on account of this unfortunate affair. Our aunt is one of the count's intimate friends, and Adrien feared he might be accused of partiality."

"But if this young man's innocence could be established, your brother would probably reconsider a resolution which was the result of exaggerated scruples."

"Possibly," was Jacques' response.

"Ah, sir, I assure you if it depended upon me—"

"Here we are," interrupted the magistrate's brother, and hastily alighting he began to ring the bell. However, the door did not open. Marchefroid was not in the habit of obeying the first summons; but Courtaumer had no scruples about disturbing him, and pulled so lustily that at last the bell-knob remained in his hand. Finally, the doorkeeper condescended to pull the rope, after taking time to light his lamp, and the next moment the gentlemen beheld him standing on the threshold of his room, arrayed in his dressing-gown, with a Jove-like frown corrugating his brow. "Where are you going?" he asked on perceiving Courtaumer, who was in advance of the others. "This is no hour for visiting. Everybody in the house is in bed."

"Except me," said Doutrelaise, as he came in sight. "Give me my candle, if you please. We don't care to break our necks in climbing the stairs."

"What, is it you, sir?" grumbled Marchefroid. "Why, you went out scarcely twenty minutes ago."

"That's very possible, but I'm coming in now. I have a perfect right to do so, I suppose," replied Doutrelaise, lighting his candle.

"You, yes, but these gentlemen—"

"I am a friend, my dear Monsieur Marchefroid, and this gentleman is a commissary of police," said Jacques. "Will you have the audacity to prevent him from entering the house which the honourable Monsieur Matapan has confided to your enlightened surveillance ?"

"I come in the name of the law," added the magistrate.

"In the name of the law ! Ah, yes, I understand. You come about that Calprenède affair—to arrest the father, probably. A very good thing ! Those people have done the baron's house a great deal of harm. If he had listened to me, he would have sent them away long ago."

The commissary, thinking it unnecessary to reply to these remarks, walked on towards the staircase. As they passed the door on the first floor he asked : "Isn't it here that Monsieur Matapan lives ?"

"Yes," replied Courtaumer ; "but it was higher up that my friend Doutrelaise met him the other night."

"And very unfortunate it was, for had it not been for that, no one would have thought of accusing Monsieur de la Calprenède."

"True, but the adventure of this evening compensates for all that, as it enables us to prove conclusively that the thief was Monsieur Matapan himself. He must have been making these nocturnal expeditions for some little time. He moved on the fifteenth of October, and I would wager a handsome amount that he has been paying frequent visits to his former domicile ever since. He must have a hiding-place there."

"I know where it is," interrupted Doutrelaise. "I saw him rummaging about in it."

"You can tell him as much when you are face to face with him," replied Courtaumer. "We haven't a moment to spare, for we left Monsieur de la Calprenède in a rather trying position. He is guarding a caged lion, and, if the lion should happen to wake, the count would have plenty of work on his hands."

The conversation ceased when they reached the next landing, "Here we are !" said Courtaumer. "Albert, you have the key."

Doutrelaise drew it from his pocket and hurriedly opened the door. He was eager to know what had occurred during his absence. The commissary entered first, and the two friends followed him. The introduction was soon over, and the count shortened it by remarking : "I have been awaiting your coming with great impatience, sir."

"Has Matapan woke up ?" inquired Jacques.

"No ; after your departure he walked about, feeling the walls and trying the locks ; but for some minutes I have heard no sound."

"What can he be doing ?" muttered Courtaumer.

"I have taken it upon myself, sir," said the commissary, addressing the count, "to complete the investigation with which I was formally charged a day or two ago. Your character is well known, and I don't in the least doubt the facts asserted by the brother of the magistrate to whom the case has been entrusted."

"Monsieur de Courtaumer has told you the truth. He met Monsieur Matapan just as he was leaving my apartments, and it is to him I shall be indebted for the happiness of proving that my son has not dishonored his name."

"Monsieur Matapan is in that room, is he not ?" inquired the magistrate.

"Yes."

"And you have only to open the door to prove it. I think it would be advisable to summon witnesses to testify to his presence."

"These gentlemen are here."

"But these gentlemen are your son's friends, I believe."

The count made a gesture of denial which applied only to Doutrelaise.

"Well," said the commissary after a moment's reflection, "I am free to act according to my own judgment. Will you have the kindness to open this door?"

M. de la Calprenède had advanced to do so, when the commissary, suddenly turning to Courtaumer, asked :

"He is still asleep, is he not?"

"I don't doubt it in the least," was Jacques' response. "I have had some experience with somnambulists, and know that these attacks are generally of prolonged duration. Besides, from what I know of Matapan's character, I am sure, that if he was not asleep, he would have tried to burst open the doors long ago."

"That is very likely. But I cannot question him in his present condition."

"No, certainly not; but I will wake him up, never fear."

"How will you do it?"

"Oh, that's an easy matter. Any violent shock will do it. Only it seems to me, it would be better for him not to be aroused immediately. I am anxious for you to satisfy yourself fully as to Monsieur Matapan's condition, and to do this you must have an opportunity of watching his movements for some minutes." And Jacques added :

"My friend Doutrelaise knows his motive in coming here. He remained alone with him nearly a quarter of an hour, and is aware of what he was doing in the study."

Doutrelaise was about to describe the scene he had witnessed when the count, who evidently desired to dispense entirely with his services, prevented him from doing so by saying to the commissary, "It seems to me we are wasting time. Let us pass from words to acts. I am going to enter the room."

"Excuse me, sir," said Jacques, stepping forward, "I will enter first, if you will allow me. I am almost certain that Monsieur Matapan is still asleep; but if he should be awake, he is quite capable of hiding behind the door, knife in hand, and in that case I ought to be the first to enter."

"I do not think so, sir," replied M. de la Calprenède, quickly; "on the contrary, it seems to me that it should be my task, and mine alone, to avenge my son."

And he advanced in such a way as to bar Courtaumer's passage. It is hard to say how long this generous controversy might have lasted, and how it would have terminated, had not Doutrelaise settled it by springing forward and hastily opening the door. He had a lighted candle in one hand, and crossed the threshold of the study without the slightest hesitation. Jacques were amazed to see what Doutrelaise had previously intimated—Matapan on his knees before the wall, near the window. But the baron, although detected in this posture, evinced no inclination to move. He did not even turn. He was evidently in a profound cataleptic slumber, and the noise had not aroused him from it, although Doutrelaise, in his eagerness, had turned the key without taking any precautions whatever. "This is

wonderful!" muttered the commissary. "Evidently he has heard nothing."

"You recognise the fact that this man is a somnambulist, do you not?" inquired the count.

"Unloubtedly; but—"

"Ah, well, let us put an end to this, so that you can question him."

"I promised to do that," interposed Jacques, quickly.

With one bound he reached Matapan, who was on his knees, and standing behind him, he seized him by both shoulders and pulled him violently backwards. The sleeper's head struck the floor so violently that it rebounded, and the hood which had concealed it fell back, revealing the strongly marked features of the landlord, while an energetic oath showed that he had regained possession of his mental powers. "Where am I?" he growled, sitting up and gazing around him with angry eyes.

"In your former apartment," replied Jacques de Courtaumer. "Good-morning, baron. Shall I give you my hand to help you up?"

Matapan deigned no response to this ironical offer, and managed to regain his feet unaided. As soon as he had done so, he instinctively leaned for support against the wall before which he had been kneeling, and gazed with mingled stupefaction and anger at the four men who surrounded him. "Take time to recover yourself. We are in no hurry," said Courtaumer.

Matapan did not require long to regain his composure; he had evidently been accustomed to finding himself in trying and unforeseen positions. "I don't know you," he said, addressing the ex-lieutenant, "so it is of Monsieur de la Calprenède that I must ask an explanation as to why he has brought me here. If it is to rob me as his son has done, I warn him that I have neither money nor jewels upon my person."

"You wretch!" muttered the count.

"Be calm," whispered the commissary.

"I forbid you to speak in that manner," interrupted Albert, angrily.

"Ah, so you are here, Monsieur Doutrelaise," sneered Matapan. "It would seem to be a conspiracy. You hope to extort money from me, but you won't succeed. I warn you that if you don't allow me to leave this room, I shall open the window or break it. I shall call for help, and I assure you that I shall call loud enough to be heard from the garret to the cellar."

"No one here has any intention of injuring you, sir," said the commissary, who until now had kept in the background.

"What do *you* want?" vociferated Matapan. "And in the first place, who are *you*? A hired assassin? Take care, scoundrel, you will have a hard struggle with me."

"Have a care yourself or you will pay dearly for your insults. I am a commissary of police, and I came here to question *you*."

"You a magistrate!—you look more like a grocer. Where is your sash?"

"If you persist in this insolence, I shall send one of these gentlemen to the nearest station-house for two policemen who will recognise me, I assure you, and who will arrest you for insulting an officer of the law in the discharge of his duty."

This was said with such an air of determination that Matapan's manner changed. "What is required of *me*?" he asked brusquely. "And why have I been brought here?"

"Then you are ignorant how you came here?"

"Certainly; I certainly did not come of my own accord. I begin to

think I have been forced to swallow a narcotic, and that some one took me from my room when I was asleep."

" You have indeed been asleep, but no one has drugged you. You are a somnambulist, baron," said Jacques de Courtaumer.

" I a somnambulist! Whom do you hope to convince that I am a somnambulist? My habits are known. I go to bed at ten o'clock, and rise with the sun, and I sleep eight and sometimes nine consecutive hours."

" Admitted, but not in your bed. You spend your nights wandering about."

" I defy you to prove that."

" It is already proved. You were found at one o'clock this morning in one of the Count de la Calprenède's apartments. You certainly are not going to try and convince the commissary that a fairy transported you there in your sleep. Feel in your pockets, and you will find there the key to the rooms you occupied last year." Matapan mechanically put his hand in one of his pockets, and his face assumed an expression which was sufficiently convincing. " You use it almost every night," continued Jacques. " And you made use of it on the night before last when you brought a certain opal necklace here."

" Ah ! so this is what you are aiming at !" exclaimed Matapan. " You have invented this farce to deceive justice."

" Excuse me, sir," interposed the commissary. " I represent justice and the law here, and I am playing no farce. I have seen sufficient to satisfy me, and I shall testify to what I have seen. I shall also state in my report that just now, when Monsieur de Courtaumer awakened you, you were on your knees before the wall against which you are now leaning."

On hearing this Matapan started, and advanced into the middle of the room.

" Yes," added Doutrelaise, " before the wall in which you have constructed a hiding-place for your valuables. I was here; I saw you press a spring, and I saw the panel descend."

" So you were in the study ?" said the baron with a diabolical smile. " It was no doubt Mademoiselle de la Calprenède who concealed you here."

Matapan had hit the nail on the head. His instincts seldom played him false. He had discovered the weak spot of his adversary's armour. The count turned pale with anger : Doutrelaise was greatly agitated, and even Courtaumer lost a little of his wonted coolness and composure. He was not prepared for this blow, but he instantly endeavoured to parry it. The commissary alone remained unmoved. He did not fully understand the import of the baron's words. It was doubtful if he even knew that M. de la Calprenède had a daughter. But he had heard Doutrelaise's assertion, and he desired to have its truth verified.

" Come, sir," he said, severely, " it matters very little to me how the gentleman, who lives on the fourth floor of this house, found his way here ; but I am anxious to know what he has seen. I therefore request, and even command him, if necessary, to complete his deposition, for this is a deposition. I am acting at this moment as the representative of the magistrate to whom the investigation of the affair has been intrusted. So will you have the goodness to tell me exactly what occurred, sir ?" he added, turning to Doutrelaise.

Albert pointed to the wall, near the window, and replied, unhesitatingly : " I am willing to swear that there is a secret cupboard there, and that

Monsieur Matapan came here to-night, as he must have done frequently before, to visit it."

The baron shrugged his shoulders, but his face grew visibly paler. Again a blow had struck home, only this time he was the person hit. "Whom will you convince of that?" he asked, sneeringly. "Besides, of what use would this pretended place of concealment be to me? To enable me to play the spy on my tenants? That is what you mean, I suppose?"

"You know very well that I mean nothing of the kind. This secret cupboard was a receptacle for your valuables when you lived in the rooms that Monsieur de la Calprenède now occupies. You must have a similar one on the first floor, and at night-time when you are asleep, you carry your valuables, such as your opal necklace, for instance, from one hiding-place to the other."

"Yes, sir," said the commissary. "The important thing is to explain why you were kneeling before that wall just now. Oh! we discovered you in that posture. Don't deny it; I was here. And Monsieur de Courtaumer was obliged to seize you by the shoulders and pull you on to the floor to wake you. What explanation have you to give?"

"None," replied Matapan, angrily. "If I was kneeling it was probably because I had grown weary of standing. You declare that I am a somnambulist, and you must admit that a somnambulist does not know what he is about."

"We admit that on waking up he does not remember what he did while he was asleep, but he does not act without an aim."

"I certainly had none when I came here. I am not on very intimate terms with the count; so it could not have been habit that brought me here."

"It was the habit of visiting the gold and valuables you have concealed in this room," said Doutrelaise.

"The same absurd story!" exclaimed Matapan.

"The valuables are there in that wall; the cupboard is concealed by a movable panel that descends when a spring is touched, and which is replaced in a similar manner. Since you have been in the room, you have probably opened and closed this cupboard several times. No one watched you while you were a prisoner, but I was here when you first entered the room."

"Ah, you were!" exclaimed the baron, ironically. "With the count's permission or that of his—"

"Baron," hastily interposed Courtaumer, "if you make any attempt to finish your sentence, I will knock you down and treat you to a sword-thrust to-morrow or the day after to-morrow, besides—"

"I am not afraid of you."

"Nevertheless I advise you to hold your tongue. Go on, my dear Albert."

Matapan muttered a few unintelligible words, but he made no further attempt to interrupt Doutrelaise, who continued his narrative by saying: "I saw you come in. You advanced slowly with your hands outstretched, and as the hood of your mantle concealed your face, I did not recognise you; but I did not miss a single one of your movements. You went straight towards that spot, knelt, and immediately pressed the spring."

"Then you know where this spring is, Monsieur Doutrelaise," interrupted the commissary.

"Pretty nearly. It must be near the floor. I was too far off to be able

to speak with certainty ; besides, I suppose it isn't visible. The person who had this hiding-place constructed, probably took good care to have the spring concealed in some moulding in the wood-work ; but by looking carefully, I am sure I should be able to find it."

"The baron might save us the trouble of looking," remarked the commissary, turning to M. Matapan.

"Let me alone, and put an end to this farce," replied the landlord coarsely. "I suppose you have nothing to gain by keeping me a prisoner here ?"

"No ; but I wish you to be present at the opening of this receptacle. When you have admitted in my presence that there is a hiding-place, and that it contains valuables which belong to you, you will beat liberty to retire."

"As if I were not at liberty to do that already !"

"Try it, and you will see," said Courtaumer.

"Very well. It is evident that this is a forcible sequestration in which a so-called magistrate has been induced to lend a hand. I shall have no struggle with you, but as for you," the baron exclaimed, shaking his fist at the commissary, "I shall report your conduct to your superiors. I shall go to the prefect of police or the public prosecutor—"

"Do so ; you will only have the trouble of telling your story. They will have heard it all before you see them, for I shall send in my report as soon as I leave this place. Monsieur Doutrelaise, will you have the goodness to take a light and look for the spring ?"

Doutrelaise required no urging. Placing one of the candles on the carpet, and assuming the attitude previously adopted by the somnambulist, he began a careful examination of the wood-work. Matapan trembled with anger, and his agitation showed that a fierce conflict between those powerful passions, hatred and avarice, was raging in his soul. "Allow me to give you some advice, sir," the commissary said to him. "My mind is made up in regard to your case and that of Monsieur Julien de la Calprenède ; and my opinion will be shared by the magistrate when he hears of the existence of the hiding-place which you have just visited in your sleep. There is little doubt but what it contains valuables which belong to you, and which will be immediately restored to you if you claim them ; but should you persist in denying that they are yours, I shall be obliged to take possession of them in the name of the law, and deposit them in the registrar's office, where your opal necklace has already found its way. You will consequently be obliged to confess the truth sooner or later ; but I presume you have no intention of losing your property, so you will save yourself a great deal of trouble by a plain statement of the facts."

"I have found the spring," exclaimed Doutrelaise. "It is only necessary to press it to make the paeul descend."

M. de la Calprenède and Jacques de Courtaumer were standing directly behind him. Matapan hastily advanced, and the commissary did the same. "Look !" said Doutrelaise, as he raised the candle and held it in such a position that it lighted up the hiding-place.

The gold, articles of silverplate, and jewels, piled haphazard on the shelves of the cupboard, sparkled brilliantly.

"When you take an inventory of the valuables concealed in your other hiding-place, you will discover that the articles you see here are missing from it," said the commissary, looking searchingly at the baron.

"That is quite possible," retorted Matapan, intensely exasperated. "I must have forgotten them when I moved. This doesn't prove, however, that I brought the opal necklace here."

"Then you admit that these articles belong to you?" inquired the commissary.

"I don't see why I should deny that they are mine," replied Matapan in a surly tone. "I have no desire to make my tenant a present of them. I will even admit, if you like, that I am a somnambulist, and that I sometimes wander about my own house at night. I have a perfect right to do so, I think. I wasn't aware that I had this unpleasant habit, however, and you have just done me a service by informing me of it. In future I will arrange to avoid it. But I repeat that this doesn't change the aspect of the Calprenède affair in the least, and I warn you that I shall not withdraw my complaint."

"You are free to persist in it, of course, sir," said the commissary with unruffled calmness; "but what you do is no longer of any great consequence, and the magistrate won't consider it necessary for you to withdraw your complaint before he releases a prisoner whose innocence is now clearly established, for I am sure that the magistrate's opinion will coincide with mine. The case will be submitted to him to-morrow morning. In the meantime, I must draw up a report which these gentlemen will sign as witnesses."

"Interested witnesses, so that their evidence is open to suspicion."

"You will be able to satisfy yourself that it is correct, for you will be obliged to sign the report as well."

"I? Never! for I defy you to compel me to do so."

"I have no intention of doing that, I assure you. I shall content myself with reporting your refusal. And this being the case, I will detain you no longer."

"Then I can go? That is really fortunate. But my gold and silver plate, and the other contents of the cupboard?"

"Will all be returned to you, as you know very well; but the existence of this treasure must first be announced to the magistrate. I think that this apartment and yours will be visited to-day. They would be examined immediately if the hour was not so late. As for the valuables concealed here, they are perfectly safe."

"How do you know?" said Matapan, insolently. "Now that the method of opening the cupboard is known—"

"Baron," again interrupted Jacques de Courtaumer, "you shall answer to me for this insolence."

"Begin by paying me what Julien de la Calprenède owes me."

"Gentlemen," interrupted the commissary, "all this has no connection with the subject. Do you desire, baron, that this movable panel should be sealed in your presence with wax upon which you shall place your private seal?"

"No, that would be equivalent to an admission that what you have done here is something more than a farce."

"As you please. Then I shall take the responsibility of leaving everything in its present state until to-morrow."

"Very well, I am going."

"Doutrelaise, hold a light for the baron," said Courtaumer, who was greatly elated. "He ought not to be allowed to return to his apartments without a light. It would be even dangerous. Now that he is awake, he might break his neck on the stairs."

Matapan was literally foaming with rage, but he preferred to wreak his vengeance upon Doutrelaise, who was more vulnerable than Jacques, and

turning to him he cried ; " You still have a part of my necklace, I believe, When will you return it to me ? "

" When you give Count de la Calprenède the key of his apartments," retorted Doutrelaise.

" Here it is," said the baron, drawing it from the pocket of his mantle, and throwing it on the table. " It would also be advisable for you to return the one which was lent you to enable you to enter his rooms."

On hearing this Albert turned white with rage, and the count again trembled with anger.

" I warn you, too," continued Matapan, " that I sha'n't deny myself the satisfaction of telling my friends and acquaintances that, in order to play the spy on me, you spend your nights in Monsieur de la Calprenède's rooms, and in the same wing in which his daughter's apartment is located. Ah ! they are truly hospitable here ! "

" You scoundrel ! " exclaimed Doutrelaise.

Once more, however, the commissary interposed. He took Matapan by the arm and led him away, saying : " I, too, am going. We will go down together. Monsieur de Courtaumer, will you allow me to use your cab ? I will send it back immediately."

" No, no," replied Jacques. " I claim the right of accompanying you home. I owe you at least that, my dear sir. We will all form a part of the baron's guard of honour, and we will take leave of him on reaching his apartments. I sha'n't offer him my arm, but I will carry the candle." Then, turning to the count, he shook hands with him, saying as he did so : " This has been a fortunate evening. My dear aunt will have pleasant news when she awakes to-morrow morning ; and, who knows ? Adrien will perhaps consent to withdraw his resignation, now that all is satisfactorily explained. Are you coining, Albert ? It seems to me you can now go to bed in a contented frame of mind. Your evening hasn't been lost."

Doutrelaise was exceedingly anxious to escape from M. de la Calprenède, whose frowning face was anything but reassuring, but that stern gentleman curtly said : " Remain, sir, if you please ; I desire to speak with you."

Albert could only comply with a request so clearly expressed. So he bowed his acquiescence, and Courtaumer did not insist upon taking him away. The worthy fellow was convinced, too, that an explanation with Arlette's father could not fail to be of advantage to his friend.

As soon as Jacques, the commissary and Matapan had left the apartment, the count exclaimed : " I have no doubt, sir, but that you have been actuated by the best of motives in your endeavours to capture Monsieur Matapan, and I rejoice that you have been successful. Still, I am surprised that you did not leave Monsieur de Courtaumer the task of unmasking this man. I have the honour to be on the best possible terms with his aunt, the Marchioness de Vervins ; so it was perfectly natural that Monsieur de Courtaumer should take an interest in my son, and try to help him. But by what right do you meddle with these matters ? Is it because you are one of our neighbours ? "

" I was Julien's friend," stammered Doutrelaise. " I am still, and—"

" My son never informed me of that. I even know that he has had just cause to complain of you. An indiscretion of which you were guilty caused this unfortunate affair. I am willing, even anxious, to believe that this was entirely due to thoughtlessness on your part, and will refrain from reproaching you ; but I do insist upon knowing how you happened to enter my apartments to night ? "

" My sole object was to capture the man who was in the habit of entering your son's room. Julien had told me that such was the case, and I had good grounds for supposing that the man would pause in this study. I swear to you, sir, that I should have gone no further."

" That is much further than you would have been allowed to penetrate with my permission. You probably forgot that I was not the only person living here. Others have remembered the fact, however. You heard the comments made by that scoundrel just now? I scorn them, but he will repeat them elsewhere, and if I do not silence him summarily my daughter's reputation may suffer. I therefore ask you to furnish me with the means of refuting them, and, to do so, you must tell me how you obtained the key."

" I—yes—I found it," murmured Doutrelaise, who longed for the ground to open and swallow him up, " and I will return it to you at once," he added, placing it on the buhl cabinet.

" You certainly cannot expect me to be satisfied with such a reply. Confess, sir, that you bribed one of the women in my employ to give it to you."

" No, no—I swear it."

" Very well, I see that you don't intend to tell me the truth, so it is useless to prolong the conversation. You may go, sir; but please recollect, in future, that the mere fact of being a neighbour does not authorise certain liberties, or indulgence in certain hopes. Consider the matter ended."

Doutrelaise, dismissed in this manner, could only leave the room without a word, which he did, overwhelmed with consternation. The count escorted him to the door with haughty politeness and then returned to the study, where he found his daughter weeping despairingly. As he entered the room, she flung herself in his arms, and exclaimed in a voice broken by her sobs: " I heard everything! It was I who gave him the key."

" You, great heavens! Unfortunate child, are you mad?"

" No; I love him," murmured Mademoiselle de la Calprenède.

XII.

THREE days had elapsed since Matapan, detected in the act, had been compelled to admit that he was in the habit of visiting the secret closet in the little study nearly every evening. The commissary had made his report, and the mystery was cleared up. A little too late unfortunately, for Adrien de Courtaumer's resignation had been tendered, and the over conscientious magistrate thought he ought not to withdraw it. But the truth was too evident not to strike the colleague who had taken his place. Julien's innocence had been established; Matapan, again summoned to testify, had not dared to assert that the opal necklace had been stolen from him by his young neighbour. Overwhelmed by incontestable evidence, the baron had admitted that the magistrate's decision was just, and if Arlette's brother was not yet at liberty, it was due solely to the fact that formalities are of paramount importance in France.

However the count and his friends were jubilant, Jacques de Courtaumer was triumphant, and Madame de Vervins in ecstasies. She was doing her best to console Adrien who was mourning over his blighted career, and even proposed to dower his daughters, the eldest of whom was only nine years old. Adrien, the most sensitive of nephews, had all the difficulty in the

world to prevent her from bestowing upon him gifts which would have seemed too much like a reward. As for Jacques, she petted him, and almost overpowered him with her attentions, but she no longer urged him to marry. The fact is the count had informed her of the confession made by Arlette, who no longer made any attempt to conceal the fact that she loved Albert Doutrelaise, and had not been cured of her passion by all her father's arguments. For the first time in her life, Arlette shewed a will of her own, and he greatly feared that nothing would daunt it. She promised not to marry Albert if M. de la Calprenède persisted in his refusal to sanction their union, but she was firmly resolved to refuse all other suitors for her hand. The count still hoped that time would weaken this determination, but he was greatly perplexed and disappointed, and he asked the advice and assistance of his old friend Madame de Vervins.

The marchioness listened with the closest attention, and was at first almost as inconsolable as the count. This unexpected passion annihilated her dearest hopes. Arlette would not accept Jacques, and as the latter would certainly make no attempt to supplant his friend in Arlette's affections, it seemed very probable that he would remain a bachelor, and that the name of Courtaumer would die out, for all Adrien's children were daughters.

Madame de Vervins began by anathematizing Doutrelaise, who had crossed her path at such an inopportune moment. She even promised M. de la Calprenède to reason with Arlette and convince her that the fourth floor tenant was not at all suited to her. But afterwards her opinions underwent some modification. She said to herself that the dear child had not chosen so unwisely after all, and besides, Jacques praised his friend so highly, and succeeded so clearly in convincing her that if it had not been for this generous and clever friend, Matapan would never have been foiled. So she soothed the count, reminded him that the days of imprisoning refractory daughters in convents were over, and declared there was no danger in his retaining his present quarters as Arlette's lover wisely abstained from making any further advances. Finally, she requested M. de la Calprenède to leave the settlement of the affair to her, and he gladly consented to do so. Madame de Vervins began operations by inviting the father and daughter to dinner, with her two nephews—Adrien's wife and three or four old friends of her own age: an ex-sea-captain, a retired officer, and a couple of dowagers. She announced, moreover, that it was quite possible two or three intimate friends might drop in after dinner.

Julien was not to be of the party, as he had not yet been set at liberty, but his release was momentarily expected, and this was a sort of *fête* given in honour of his complete vindication. His father accepted the invitation, and the apartments in the Rue de Castiglione were illuminated as brilliantly as for a ball. At nine o'clock the company rose from table. The dinner had been delicious—and what was better still, it had been a very gay one. Even the Count de la Calprenède had felt obliged to assume a smiling face, and his daughter had not appeared noticeably depressed in spirits. She felt thankful to Madame de Vervins for not having seated her beside Jacques at table, and this made her hope that the marchioness had renounced the project which had once alarmed her so much. Still, Arlette fancied that Madame de Vervins was preparing for something, probably a conversation with her, for she had bestowed many affectionate glances upon her during the dinner; but she was not afraid, for she knew that Jacques' aunt was the best and most indulgent of women. They lingered a long

time over their coffee, and then Jacques and the representatives of the military and naval professions went to the library to smoke, while Madame Adrien de Courtaumer returned home to nurse one of her daughters who was poorly. Her husband remained, however, and Madame de Vervins lost no time in making up a whist party to engage his attention and that of the two dowagers and Count de la Calprenède.

Arlette understood these manœuvres, and was not at all surprised when the marchioness took her gently by the hand, and whispered, after kissing her affectionately: "These people are all engaged now. Come with me, little one, and we will talk together like a couple of friends."

Arlette allowed herself to be conducted to the good lady's favourite corner, sequestered, as it were, by the folds of a screen brought from China by her deceased great-uncle, the Knight of Malta. When the old lady was comfortably installed in her armchair, and had made Arlette sit down close beside her, she looked her straight in the eyes, and said, smiling: "My dear child, I have brought you here to confess. You suspected it, didn't you?"

"I read it in your face while we were at the table," murmured the young girl.

"Then as you know the subject on which I desire to speak to you I will omit all preliminary remarks, and put the great question, Do you love him?"

"With my whole soul," replied Arlette, without displaying the slightest embarrassment.

"You don't conceal your sentiments, and you are perfectly right," exclaimed Madame de Vervins gaily. "I detest hypocrites, and I equally abhor the people who answer with downcast eyes and ambiguous phrases. Frankness is a trait that becomes women of noble birth. You are a Calprenède, and no Calprenède ever told a falsehood. I knew that when your brother was accused, and that is why I defended him from the first. But it is equally true that the Calprenèdes have never married beneath them."

"I shall be guilty of *no mésalliance*," replied the young girl, quickly. "I shall remain as I am; but my love is not dependent upon my own will."

"Well answered, my dear child. In other words, you would rather be unhappy all your life, than marry against your father's wishes. That is very noble; but I do not think any one has a right to demand such a sacrifice of you. The question is, are you not deceived respecting the sentiment that Monsieur Doutrelaise has inspired in your heart? In the first place, what do you know about him? Where have you met him?"

"Everywhere in society—at Monsieur de Fourrilles', at Madame de Rennévilliers', and at your own house, madame."

"True, he has been invited here several times as was natural, for he is very intimate with Jacques. But I confess that I don't recollect him very distinctly. People tell me he is very good-looking, and you must certainly think so; but I am anxious to judge for myself, and I have invited him to drop in this evening."

"What! you would consent—"

"To receive him at my house? Most assuredly. He has been here before, and I hope he will come again this evening. I am expecting him."

"This evening?" repeated Mademoiselle de la Calprenède, turning pale with emotion.

"Yes," replied the marchioness, smiling. "You will see him. It is a little surprise I planned for you, my dear. Confess that old ladies have some good qualities."

"I see in this another proof of your kindness of heart, madame ; but I do not know that my father will approve—"

"Your father ! Oh ! I have not consulted him. I am at liberty, I think, to receive any one I choose in my own house. Besides, he knows perfectly well that Monsieur Doutrelaise is my nephew's most intimate friend, so he cannot be offended with me for inviting him. Nor do you imagine, I suppose, that I have invited your lover here to give him an opportunity of paying court to you. In that case, your father would have a perfect right to be angry. But I have had no such object. I simply wished to satisfy myself that you had chosen wisely. I should like to know this young man better ; to have an opportunity of studying his character. When I know what kind of man he really is, I shall give you my advice. What do you think of my plan ?"

"Oh ! madame, how can I express my profound gratitude for your kindness ! I little expected to find an advocate in you—"

"Why ? Because I was anxious for you to marry Jacques ? I don't deny that I desired the match. I should have been delighted to call you my niece. But I soon discovered that you were not at all inclined to grant me this satisfaction, and to tell the truth, Jacques was not much more inclined to gratify me than you were, so I gave up the project. Jacques tells me that he is firmly resolved to remain a bachelor. Accordingly, your marriage with him is now out of the question. Moreover, he told me how he had discovered that his friend entertained a deep affection for you, although he had done his best to conceal the fact from every one. I must admit that I thought the better of Monsieur Doutrelaise on that account ; in the first place, it proved that he had good taste, and was cautious. It cost Jacques any amount of trouble to extort a confession from him, though he certainly had no reason to blush for his love ; still, my nephew would never have succeeded, if this necklace affair had not occurred. On hearing that your brother was accused of a crime, Monsieur Doutrelaise betrayed his love by his intense desire to save Julien. He has succeeded in doing this. Indeed, I do not know how we should have escaped from the difficulty had it not been for him."

"And Monsieur Jacques de Courtaumer and yourself," added Arlette.

"Oh, I did all I could, but I only succeeded in getting my nephew Adrien into a very unpleasant predicament, for which his wife will never forgive me. As for Jacques, he greatly helped in capturing Monsieur Matapan, but it was Monsieur Doutrelaise who originated the scheme, and, by the way, your father tells me you abetted him."

"The same idea had occurred to me," murmured the young girl.

"And you could devise no better plan than to pay your young neighbour a visit one morning."

"I knew that Monsieur de Courtaumer was there."

"A great protection the presence of that young scapegrace must have been ! But how about the key which you entrusted to your lover ?"

"It was the only means of foiling my brother's accuser, and proving the falseness of his charge."

"And you would also like to add that Monsieur Doutrelaise is an honourable man, quite incapable of taking advantage of his position, and that the whole affair ended most satisfactorily. In short, you would like to repeat what I have already said to myself, and you feel sure that I shall forgive you. You are right, I shall not be more severe than your father. Still it is true you have been guilty of great indiscretion. Matapan suspects

it, and the scoundrel is quite capable of circulating scandalous reports about you."

"Monsieur Doutrelaise will not allow it," was Arlette's quick response.

"Nor Jacques either," added the marchioness, laughing. "He assured me that he should take it upon himself to chastise the rascal if he ventured to say one word, but I think a duel between any of the parties would only increase the publicity, and in my opinion the best way to silence gossips would be—Can't you guess?"

"No, madame."

"For you to marry Monsieur Doutrelaise as soon as possible. When he is your husband, or even when your engagement is announced, no importance whatever will be attached to this story about the key."

"Oh, madame, if you could only be induced to say that to my father, he would listen to you undoubtedly, and I might hope—"

"But this is exactly what I shall say to him, my dear child. I should have said it already had I not desired to consult you before acting. I am now satisfied in regard to your feelings, as well as in regard to the merits of Monsieur Doutrelaise, and the advantages of a marriage which I did not desire, but which, nevertheless, seems very satisfactory to me. Jacques tells me that his friend has a very handsome and safely-invested fortune; a point of no little importance, as your father has been foolish enough to sink three quarters of his belongings in unfortunate speculations. Jacques also tells me that Doutrelaise belongs to a very old and highly-respected family. One of his ancestors held the office of Councillor under the monarchy, and was offered a title, which he did not deign to accept, however, so that his descendants have remained commoners. This is unfortunate, to be sure, but a great deal of credit is due to the young man for not writing his name with an apostrophe after the *D*."

"He abhors deceit," said Arlette, proudly.

"I should need nothing more than the manner in which you utter those words to convince me that you love him," remarked Madame de Vervins gaily; "and I am satisfied that he is worthy of your affection, for I know through my nephew that he is brave, honourable, intelligent, and good. I know, too, that he did his duty courageously during the war with Germany, and that he has always conducted himself in an irreproachable manner. Jacques thinks him really too conscientious. I regret that he leads an idle life. It would be much better for him to engage in business or even to serve the government. It seems, however, that he has a taste for the fine arts—"

"He is an excellent musician."

"I will take your word for it without putting his talent to the test this evening, for my old friends hate the piano. But I intend to talk to him as we old-fashioned people talk. Oh, don't be alarmed on his account! Our conversation will not last long, a quarter of hour perhaps, and after that I will tell you if he is worthy of you."

"Is it really true that he is coming?" inquired the girl, blushing at the mere thought of seeing him.

"Yes, certainly, and lovers never fail to profit by such an opportunity. My nephew Jacques took him my invitation this morning, and the poor fellow was overcome with joy. It isn't necessary to add that he accepted, although he is terribly afraid of your father, who dislikes him."

"So does my brother, I am told," murmured Arlette.

"They will both change their opinions. If they don't, they will be very

unjust, my dear child, for if it had not been for Monsieur Doutrelaise, Heaven only knows what would have become of the honour of your name. I will make them listen to reason, Jacques will assist me, and I am anxious he should be here when Monsieur Doutrelaise arrives. If I don't send for him he will stay in his present quarters all the evening, so do me the favour to go and see if those enthusiastic smokers haven't ceased poisoning the air of my library by this time. Tell them I insist upon their immediate return to the drawing-room. Make haste, my dear. It won't be long before your lover makes his appearance. I am even surprised that he has not arrived already."

Arlette did not compel her hostess to repeat the request, but instantly rose to obey her with a lighter heart than she had known for many a day. She had expected to be scolded and catechised by Madame de Vervins; but she had only had to listen to affectionate advice such as any loving mother might bestow upon her daughter. Better still, Madame de Vervins had cheerfully renounced her former hopes, and espoused Albert's cause.

On going into the library, Arlette found the smokers there lounging upon the divans. The old officer found an occasional opportunity to relate some anecdote of the court of Charles X., but the conversation was chiefly maritime in its nature. The retired sea-captain was relating his adventures, and as he had spent a good deal of time in the China seas, with which Jacques de Courtamer was also familiar, the conversation was extremely animated. Mademoiselle de la Calprenède entered just as the ancient mariner was furnishing an account of his unsuccessful chase after some Malay pirates whom he had pursued for a long time. Their chief, a very crafty scoundrel of unknown nationality, who had captured and destroyed at least twenty vessels belonging to a Dutch colony, had always succeeded in escaping from his pursuers. "The scamp must have secured an incredible amount of spoil," continued the old officer. "Among other prizes he captured a ship bound for Java, with a prince of that country, who had visited Paris under the Restoration, on board. Your great-uncle, who was very fond of collecting Oriental curiosities, had known him during his sojourn in France. However, the unfortunate nabob was murdered some twenty years ago by the scoundrels in command of the craft I speak off, and all the valuables on board were stolen."

"Tell my aunt about that," said Jacques, as he sprang up to meet Arlette, who was just entering. "I am certain that it will interest her extremely, for she well remembers our relative, the Knight of Malta."

"Gentlemen," began the young girl, gaily, "Madame de Vervins is complaining of your absence, and sends me to remind you that she is alone in her favourite corner, her lady friends being engaged with my father and Monsieur Adrien de Courtamer at the whist-table."

"We are entirely at her service," said the old officer, gallantly. "Our friend here is entirely to blame for our protracted absence, for he would persist in talking to us about pirates, although I should infinitely prefer hearing you play Mozart."

"Is that really true? Madame de Vervins told me just now that you detested music."

The old officer was about to protest against such a charge, but Jacques led Arlette away. He offered her his arm to escort her back to the drawing-room, but to reassure her as to the meaning of this attention, he said in a subdued tone: "I hope my aunt has told you that she is expecting

our friend this evening. I went to deliver the invitation in person, and I assure you that no urging was required to induce him to accept."

"Oh, sir," murmured Arlette, with an emotion which her face and voice plainly betrayed; "how can I express—"

"Don't express it at all. I am delighted to have effected my aunt's conversion, and I assure you that Albert will complete the conquest."

"I greatly fear that he will never make a conquest of my father."

"That will perhaps be a more difficult task, but it will be accomplished sooner or later. I have already begun by praising him enthusiastically, and Monsieur de la Calprenède did me the honour to listen without interrupting me, so you see we have made some progress. Still I am a little surprised that Albert has not yet arrived. He is always remarkably punctual, and there are special reasons why he should be so this evening. It is already ten o'clock, and in my aunt's house whist-parties are not prolonged until morning."

"I know it, and I am beginning to feel rather anxious. This Monsieur Matapan must be anything but amicably disposed towards you and Monsieur Doutrelaise."

"Oh, yes, he hates us with true Corsican hatred—in fact, he has virtually declared a vendetta against us. But I have taken the affair into my own hands, and will attend to him. Have no fears, mademoiselle; in ten minutes or so, Albert will be here and all will be well."

The marchioness summoned the delinquents to her side as soon as they entered the room, and they formed a circle around her. Arlette, however, did not seat herself, but soon went to look over some music to hide her agitation. It was only natural that she should be deeply affected, for that evening was to decide the happiness of her whole life. Jacques had the discretion to refrain from following her, and she was left quite undisturbed, the two old gentlemen whom she had brought from the smoking-room having seated themselves near Madame de Vervins. Her father was engrossed in his game, for whist even at half a franc a counter is an absorbing diversion, and M. de la Calprenède had for his partner a dowager who was constantly inquiring what were trumps.

The old sea-captain soon resumed his recollections of Madame de Vervins' ancestor, the Knight of Malta, and the conversation did not flag. The marchioness was fourteen when her great-uncle died, and she remembered his face, costume, and peculiarities perfectly well. She even remembered the Java prince, in whose honour the old chevalier had given a *fête* in 1824, and she had been presented to this Oriental dignitary, who had condescended to compare her to a Bengal rose. "He talked in the style of the characters of the 'Bourgeois Gentilhomme,'" she said gaily, "and I always wondered where my uncle had met him."

"You forget, my dear madame, that the chevalier had formerly served in the East," replied the captain.

"Very true, but this prince was very young even in 1824."

"Nor was he very advanced in years when the pirates killed him twenty years ago. Your uncle had met his father in India, and esteemed him highly. So he welcomed the son very cordially for the father's sake. They got on remarkably well together, for they both had a passion for precious stones, and the rajah had any quantity of them. I can still remember a certain opal necklace which he wore about his neck, and which your uncle wanted to purchase from him. The rajah would not consent to part with it, however, but he lent it to your uncle for several days, and the chevalier

exhibited it to all his friends. I was only a child at the time, but he showed it to me as he probably did to you."

"An opal necklace!" repeated Madame de Vervins, who had been thrown into a state of extraordinary agitation by this explanation. "Yes, I recollect it now, I have seen and handled it. And you tell me that it fell into the hands of some pirates?"

"Yes, it was stolen by the pirates who killed the unfortunate rajah."

Just then, the footman opened the door and gently announced: "Monsieur Albert Doutrelaise."

The old servant had not forgotten the instructions of his mistress, but although he announced Doutrelaise in a subdued tone, the name made several persons start.

Arlette turned pale, and opened a portfolio of music to conceal her embarrassment. Jacques looked up, and hastened forward to meet his friend; M. de la Calprenède fidgeted in his chair, and played so absurdly that the dowager in front of him cried: "What! you don't trump? Ah, my dear count, that is a great mistake. Am I not right in saying that anybody else would have done so?"

The count made no response. He was glancing alternately at Doutrelaise and Madame de Vervins, asking himself what had brought his neighbour into this drawing-room, and hoping that the marchioness would show him to the door. Adrien de Courtaumer also scrutinized the countenance of this witness whom he had summoned, but who had failed to present himself. Meanwhile Madame de Vervins rose quickly. "Would you recognise that necklace if you saw it again?" she inquired of the sea-captain.

"I was only thirteen years old when your uncle showed it to me, and I am now sixty-nine, so my recollection of it is not very distinct; but it was so beautiful that there can't be many like it in existence. I remember that the opals seemed to me as large as pigeon-eggs, though it is true that I then saw them with childish eyes. Nevertheless, I think I should recognise the necklace now, if it was shown to me."

"I shall perhaps have an opportunity to put your memory to the test, my dear captain."

"What! has the scoundrel who stole it offered to sell it to you? Ah! your uncle wouldn't have missed such an opportunity."

"No, that is not the case. We will resume this conversation later on, for I must now go and receive my nephew's friend, the young man François just announced."

"He is a handsome fellow, upon my word! Has he ever served in the navy?"

Madame de Vervins did not reply, she had advanced a few steps, just enough to bestow a gracious welcome on the new-comer, without displaying an eagerness and cordiality that would have aroused the count's suspicions at once. Jacques de Courtaumer had already monopolized Doutrelaise. He had hastened towards him with both hands extended, and had placed himself in such a position as to screen his friend from the persons who were watching him. "Don't be afraid," he said in a low tone. "My aunt is very kindly disposed toward you. Display all the old-time gallantry in your manner towards her! The father means to keep an eye on you, but have no fears. I will take care of him." And he added quickly:

"But why are you so late?"

"Monsieur Matapan was the cause of it. I have had a violent scene with him—"

"What has the scoundrel dared—— But this is no time for conversation. Come and let me present you to my aunt."

It was time, for Madanne de Vervins stood waiting, and she was not accustomed to wait. Jacques took his friend familiarly by the arm and led him towards her. "I scarcely know how to express my deep gratitude, madame," began Doutrelaise, "for an invitation which——"

"Allow me to cut your compliments short," interrupted Madame de Vervins, smiling. "In the first place, I have already had the pleasure of seeing you at several of my balls—when I gave balls—besides, you are the oldest and best friend my nephew has. I have reproached him a long time for not bringing you to see me at my Wednesday at-homes; but the scapegrace himself is always disappointing me. You must bring him, and between you both, you will rejuvenate us a little. We stand greatly in need of it."

This was said loud enough for everybody to hear it, and the little speech was evidently intended to explain the advent of this unexpected guest to the count. The latter listened with a frown on his brow, and the marchioness resumed : "I will introduce you to all our friends at the conclusion of the game. Whist is an exciting divinity, and we mustn't disturb its worshippers, so come and talk with me if an old woman's society has no terrors for you."

To tell the truth the game had been greatly neglected since the arrival of Doutrelaise. Adrien de Courtamer had ceased to take any interest in it, and M. de la Calprenède was making blunder after blunder to the great delight of the dowagers, who both pretended to play much better than he did. Madame de Vervins had taken in the whole situation at once, and had devised a plan to prevent any change while she talked to Arlette's lover. "Jacques," she said, "do me the favour to prepare the backgammon-board for the captain, who owes Monsieur de Boisrobert an opportunity to revenge himself." Then turning to Mademoiselle de la Calprenède, who was apparently absorbed in the examination of a piece of music, she added : "My dear child, you must give us a little music. These gentlemen care very little for it, but you can play softly. Choose one of Schubert's compositions and soothe us. If we should be in any danger of falling asleep the sound of the dice will arouse us."

No one protested against the old lady's orders. The two old gentlemen adored backgammon, and Madame de Vervins did not often allow this rather noisy game in her house. As for Arlette, she did not even hope that Albert would venture to speak to her in M. de la Calprenède's presence, and she deemed herself fortunate in being provided with an occupation. The piano is an instrument which seems to have been made for the express purpose of allowing young ladies to isolate themselves, and to express their feelings unreproved. So Arlette began to play from memory the prelude to "Le Roi des Aulnes," a ballad which was a great favourite with the marchioness, and the sweet and melancholy strains of which harmonized well with the musician's mood.

Meanwhile Madame de Vervins made Albert take a seat beside her, and opened the conversation by saying abruptly : "Do you know, my dear sir, I have executed a perfect *coup d'état* by inviting you. I am in imminent danger of a quarrel with my old friend, the count; but I have not acted without due reflection, or without making many inquiries about you; and if I have espoused your cause, it is only because I consider you almost certain to make Arlette happy. I shall not tell you that she loves you. You know

that even better than I do ; I even think she has been rather too forward, and that she has compromised herself a little by going to see you. I have just scolded her severely for that escapade, and I think the only way of repairing this blunder is to marry you both, so I am going to try to accomplish it ; still, you must not take it amiss if I ask you a few questions."

" Speak, madame, and I assure you that no matter what you ask—"

" Very well, but don't promise too much. I know that you are honest, and I am sure I can depend upon your sincerity. I don't ask the amount of your fortune. I know that ; you have always lived handsomely, but you have never made any inroads upon your patrimony. I wish I could say as much for my nephew Jacques ; however, I am not equally well informed concerning your relatives and connections."

" My mother died in bringing me into the world, and I lost my father while I was at college. I was brought up by my mother's brother, General Mérignan, who died ten years ago. I have no other near relatives. As for my intimate associates, I go into society very little and have only one real friend—"

" And that is Jacques de Courtaumer. You might have made a worse choice, for he loves you with all his heart. So you are free from all cliques and objectionable acquaintances, and as a natural consequence, you are in a position only to receive such persons as you wish to receive when you are married. You are not yet one of us, but you will soon be, and perhaps your example will convert my nephew. The count is slightly prejudiced against you, it is true, but he will soon get over it. On what terms are you with his son ? "

" On excellent terms, at least I thought so, but Jacques tells me that Julien is very angry with me for having been the involuntary cause of a deplorable mistake."

" But you have more than atoned for that by unmasking Monsieur Matapan. Now my dear sir, I will broach another subject. You are aware that Mademoiselle de la Calprenède has no dowry."

" I should be only too happy to make my entire fortune over to her," said Doutrelaise eagerly ; " and I entreat you to believe, madame—"

" That is sufficient, my dear sir," interrupted Madame de Vervins ; " that is being even too generous and disinterested. But I see that Monsieur de la Calprenède is leaving the table, no doubt with the intention of taking his daughter away, and I am going to try and detain him. We can resume our conversation a little later on. You play whist, don't you ? "

" I play the game—very badly," stammered Doutrelaise, who was totally unprepared for this question. He had not come to play whist, and his conversation with the marchioness was far more interesting.

" Make a sacrifice for me," said Madame de Vervins. " You must have no conversation with Monsieur de la Calprenède before I have pleaded your cause with him. Take his place at the whist-table. My friends will be extremely grateful to you, for the game will end if you refuse to take the fourth hand and all my guests will leave ; while, if Monsieur de la Calprenède sees you occupied, he will abandon the idea of going until after he has had a talk with me. Insure me time to plead for you."

" I am at your orders, madame, but—"

" Come, come, don't let my friends leave the table. And don't be too much appalled by the prospect. Some pleasant diversions will be allowed. You will have a chance of listening to Mademoiselle de la Calprenède who is about to sing, and even of looking at her."

After this mischievous remark, the marchioness presented Doutrelaise to the dowagers as an enthusiastic amateur, burning with a desire to be their partners. They greeted him with effusion, and had they had any voice in the matter they would have unhesitatingly bestowed Arlette's hand upon this polite young man, who was so ready to devote himself to their enjoyment. Adrien de Courtaumer also gave him a cordial reception, for he had no grudge against him, and was not sorry to make his acquaintance. M. de la Calprenède had just left the table after paying the money he had lost, and he was now proceeding towards the piano, with the evident intention of urging his daughter to conclude Schubert's ballad as speedily as possible, for he was not only anxious to get her away, but to manifest his displeasure at Doutrelaise's presence by an early departure.

Madame de Vervins, who had foreseen this step, was prepared to prevent it. As soon as the introductions were over, she approached Arlette, and had already found time to whisper: "Have no fears, my child, but sing us '*Le Roi des Aulnes*' very slowly—as slowly as possible. In that case, your father can't claim you. When you have finished the ballad, I will ask for one of Mozart's sonatas—the longest one I can think of—and, while you are executing that, I will eulogize your lover in such enthusiastic terms, that I shall, perhaps, succeed in converting my old friend before we part."

Arlette thanked her with an eloquent look, and began the air in such a weak and trembling voice that it was almost inaudible. But the marchioness did not have an opportunity of employing her persuasive powers with the father. Jacques had perceived the situation, and he, in turn, had resolved to prevent the count's departure; so he advanced leisurely towards him, and began by asking a question that was sure to interest him.

"May I ask, sir," he said, "if my aunt was mistaken in assuring me the other day that you had a business enterprise to propose to me? She pretends that I could be of service to you in some matter; but that was all she would consent to tell me."

"It is true, sir," replied M. de la Calprenède, "and I should have broached the subject before, if I had not been so unpleasantly occupied for several days past."

"And for the same reason, I have been unable to call on you and place myself at your disposal; but now that Monsieur Matapan is foiled, and this absurd affair ended, I eagerly embrace an opportunity to offer you my help, if it will be of service to you in any way."

"It is indispensable to me," replied the count, quickly.

"Then rely upon me, sir. What do you propose to do?"

"It will take some time to explain, and I fear I shall bore you; besides, it is late, and I—"

"My aunt adores music, and Mademoiselle de la Calprenède won't escape until she has played at least half a dozen pieces. You surely will not be so inhuman as to take her away before she has finished. So, we have at least three quarters of an hour at our disposal. Why not employ it in giving me a brief account of your plans. I can then tell you at once if I think I am capable of performing the part you have kindly allotted to me, and we can conclude our conversation to-morrow. Shall we seat ourselves a little apart from the others, on that sofa at the other end of the room?"

The count hesitated. He was exceedingly anxious to interest Jacques de Courtaumer in the enterprise, upon which all his hopes for the future

depended ; but he also wished to prevent a meeting between Arlette and Doutrelaise, which he suspected the marchioness of having plotted to effect. However, a glance around the drawing-room reassured him. Arlette was singing in one corner of the room, guarded by Madame de Vervins ; and Doutrelaise was chained to the whist-table. " Well, sir," the suspicious nobleman replied, after a short silence, " though it will be impossible for me to enter into details now, I can give you some idea of my scheme."

" That will suffice for a beginning," replied Jacques, leading the way to the sofa he had chosen.

" I must first ask you to keep what I tell you a secret," remarked the count, as soon as they were seated. " Now, tell me, would you be willing to leave Paris ? "

" Leave Paris ? " repeated Courtaumer, considerably surprised. " What do you mean ? If you mean forever, I must confess that—"

" It would only be for a few months at the longest, and you would be able to return whenever you chose to do so."

" Under those conditions, nothing would suit me better. I should have the pleasure of obliging you, and the advantage of being out of the way of temptation for a time. This would be a very good thing, for the season hasn't opened well. I lost in a single night, last week, half of my yearly income."

" If we succeed in the undertaking I am going to propose, you will be able to lose several thousand louis without the slightest inconvenience," replied Arlette's father smiling.

" What ! do you propose working some unknown gold mine in California or Australia ? "

" Far from it. But are you familiar with the coast of Brittany ? "

" I am much more familiar with that part than with the Boulevards and the Champs-Elysées. I once spent six months on a government steamer, intrusted with the protection of our western fisheries. We had on board a hydrographer, whose mission it was to correct the maps on certain points. He deputized me to make the soundings, and there is not a rock between Nantes and Saint-Malo that I don't know."

" It certainly must have been Heaven that suggested to me the idea of applying to you. Now, I have no longer any doubt of our success."

" Nor I, since you say so ; but I am wondering in what way my limited experience as a sailor can be of service to you."

" I will explain, my dear Jacques," replied the count, becoming more and more affectionate in his manner. " Two years ago I was in London. Upon the recommendation of a Frenchman, who kept the hotel where I stopped, I assisted a poor American sailor who had been picked up at sea and brought to England. He was the sole survivor of a ship-wrecked vessel's crew, and had been found clinging to a chicken-coop, half dead with cold and exhaustion, after being buffeted by the waves for twelve hours. I had him properly cared for at my expense, and gave him some money ; but he had undergone too many hardships to recover, and he died. But he did not carry with him to the grave a certain secret which he had in his possession, and which was worth millions. He confided it to me out of gratitude—"

" Ah, I begin to see what you mean. The vessel was laden with gold or silver, and the surviving sailor knew where it was ; but—What is it, François ? " Jacques hastily inquired, turning to the valet who had just entered the room, and was now standing beside him.

"I should like to say a word to you, sir," muttered François, who really appeared terrified.

"Very well; say it," was Jacques' response.

"I should like to speak to you alone."

"Why don't you go to my aunt?"

"Madame has nothing to do with the matter on which I desire to speak to you, sir."

"François, you are too fond of mysteries, and you must allow me to converse with Monsieur de la Calprenède for a moment longer. Be kind enough to remove the empty cups from the tea-table. As soon as you have done that, come back, and I will listen to you."

The old servant reluctantly obeyed.

"The vessel contained twelve millions," continued the count, when François had moved away.

"That would indeed be a godsend," said Courtaumer, laughing, "but unfortunately it didn't belong to the sailor who told you about it. The ship was insured, I suppose, and the company that paid the amount of the insurance was of course the owner of the wreck."

"I knew that, and the sailor was equally well aware of it, for he had come to London for the express purpose of negotiating with the company."

"Hum! I fancy that he did not meet with a very encouraging reception. The ship was not his property."

"No; but everybody supposed that it was lost in mid-ocean. He alone knew that the vessel had been wrecked upon a rock very near the coast; so the secret was his, and the secret was worth millions."

"Did you buy it from him?" inquired Jacques.

"He wished to sell it to the company, but as I had alleviated the misery of his last hours, he gave it me freely and unreservedly."

"I am inclined to think that the gift was not very valuable."

"Why?" inquired the count, surprised and almost angry.

"Because this pretended secret was known to more than one person. I'm sure of it. A ship wrecked near the coast does not disappear like a juggler's ball."

"You are mistaken, sir. No one else knew what had become of the ship. I have satisfied myself on this point."

"I don't doubt what you say, of course," replied Courtaumer, who found it difficult to preserve his gravity, "but it is very difficult to believe that a shipwreck in sight of land was not witnessed by some one, or that some trace of it has never been discovered. Still such a thing might happen; anything is possible. Matapan's story is no less extraordinary than this one of the submerged millions, lost to everybody save one solitary individual. Only allow me to remind you that this man had no right to transfer to you, even gratuitously, a property that did not belong to him."

"You are telling me no news. I am perfectly well aware that the underwriters were the lawful owners of the lost vessel, and you will do me the justice to believe that I have never thought for a single instant of defrauding them."

"Of course. You might as well ask me if I think you capable of robbery."

"So I made a proposition to them," said M. de la Calprenède, in a rather aggrieved tone. "I said to them: 'You don't know where the shipwreck occurred, and it is not likely that you will ever ascertain; but I have information which leads me to hope that I may succeed in finding the

gold. It is an extremely hazardous undertaking that I have just proposed to you, but I am willing to assume the risk. How much will you take for the ship and her cargo ?' At first they even refused my offer, and I very well understood why. They wished to exhaust every possible source of information in the hope of discovering the secret which the sea still guarded, but which had come into my possession in such a strange way. They were not successful, however, for at the end of eighteen months, when I had almost ceased to think about the affair, they wrote that they were willing to negotiate with me. I returned to London, and signed a contract by which all the rights of the underwriters were ceded to me."

"In consideration of the payment of a large sum of money, I suppose?"

"One hundred and twenty-five thousand francs."

"And you paid it?"

"In cash, although it took nearly all that remained of my fortune. But I did not think the price too dear."

"One hundred and twenty-five thousand francs is nothing in comparison with twelve millions, it is true ; but—"

"But what?"

"Excuse me, count, but François is hanging about us like a soul in distress. Will you allow me to say a word to him to put him out of his misery?"

At a gesture of acquiescence from M. de la Calprenède, Jacques beckoned to the old servant, and said to him, in a low tone, "What is the matter? Speak, if you like, but be quick."

"If monsieur would only consent to leave the room with me for a moment," said François, entreatingly.

"Really, you worry me beyond endurance. Does any one desire to see me?"

"Yes, sir—that is to say, not you, but—"

"François, the mystery of the Sphinx is as clear as crystal in comparison with your discourse; but you can tell the person who deputized you to summon me that I must beg of him to wait a few moments: and now that you have received this satisfactory response, vanish. Your conversation with me will displease my aunt, who is even now watching us."

François obeyed, but not without bestowing upon Jacques a beseeching glance, which plainly implied: "I entreat you, sir, not to delay too long. The matter is important."

"I should have thought, count," said Jacques, again turning to M. de la Calprenède, "that before paying such a large amount you would have satisfied yourself that the wreck was at the place indicated."

"I did so—at least so far as it was in my power to do it. Before visiting the underwriters I made a short excursion to Brittany, and recognised the ledge upon which the vessel had struck—the shipwrecked sailor had given me a minute description of the surroundings—but the people in the neighbourhood had no knowledge of the event, and I took care not to begin a search which would have aroused their curiosity."

"A wise precaution, but I am very much afraid it was useless. Still, you were probably not satisfied with a single expedition; you doubtless returned to the coast afterwards."

"No, for the very good reason that the insurance company was constantly watching me through its emissaries, and I knew it. If I had been imprudent enough to pay a second visit to the coast where the disaster occurred I should have lost my chance, and it was only because I took such

care to guard my secret that the underwriters were at last induced to make terms with me. I have since learned one amusing item. It seems that they had received from one of their agents a report in which he declared that I had squandered my entire fortune in rash speculations, and that this one had captivated me on account of its novelty. He also stated that I must have been made the dupe of some unreliable person. The underwriters thought themselves very shrewd to take advantage of what they called a Frenchman's folly, and they were very glad to sell me their claim to an irrecoverable cargo, for five thousand pounds."

"That isn't at all strange," replied Jacques, repressing a strong desire to laugh. "I understand their reasoning, but I hope they will soon have cause to regret their bargain. It seems to me there is nothing to prevent you from beginning operations now. You have nothing more to conceal from them now that you are the lawful owner of these millions."

"Yes, there can be no possible doubt on that point. The contract cannot be annulled either in England or in France. I have only to take possession of my property now."

"And that is where the real trouble begins, it seems to me," said Courtaumer, smiling. "If you are really inclined to enlist me in it, however, I— Why, here is François back again. The old fellow must have been bitten by a gnat this evening; he can't keep still. This time he appeals to my friend Doutrelaise."

The old servant had just re-entered the drawing room; but instead of proceeding towards the sofa where M. de la Calprenède and Jacques were sitting, he approached the whist-table, and whispered a few words in Albert's ear. If François was guilty of such a liberty with one of Madame de Vervins' guests, and particularly with one whom he did not know, it was evident that the message he had been charged to deliver was one of exceptional importance. "What the devil can he have to say to him?" thought Jacques.

The count had paused in his revelations to see what was going on near the fireplace.

The situation was virtually unchanged. Arlette had finished "Le Roi des Aulnes," and was now executing one of Mozart's compositions to the great delight of Madame de Vervins, who was keeping time with her head. The two officers had just stopped playing after an exciting game. The old military man had beaten the naval officer, and the latter, vexed at his defeat, had turned his back on his victorious rival, and seated himself behind the chair of one of the dowagers, with the laudable intention of advising her. The old military man on his side had rejoined the marchioness near the piano. Chance had placed Doutrelaise in such a position that on his right, he could see Mademoiselle de la Calprenède, and on his left Jacques, talking with Arlette's father, and he had profited by the opportunities thus afforded, for whist was the game he most abhorred. Courtaumer noticed with considerable anxiety that he changed countenance while listening to François, and was not a little surprised at what followed. After a short conversation with the servant, Doutrelaise asked the naval officer if he would have the kindness to take his place for a moment, which request was eagerly complied with. Whereupon Doutrelaise stammered an excuse to his companions, and rose and left the room without glancing at any one.

To say that the players regretted his departure would be an untruth, for his blunders had exasperated them almost beyond endurance; but Arlette,

who had been equally absent-minded, as was proved by the false notes that slipped from her usually skilful fingers, was greatly agitated on seeing him leave the room, for her feminine instinct warned her that something of an unfortunate nature had just occurred. She glanced inquiringly at Madame de Vervins, who had been surprised, and even a little shocked, by Albert's abrupt departure; however, with an encouraging gesture the old lady not only reassured the young girl, but bade her go on murdering the sonatas of the immortal composer of "Don Giovanni."

M. de la Calprenède said nothing, though he felt very uneasy. Jacques had no difficulty in fathoming the cause of his anxiety. The count was evidently afraid that when Doutrelaise re-entered the drawing-room, he would not return to the whist-table, but approach Arlette. Music is an excellent pretext, and Doutrelaise knew it. The count had not forgotten a certain conversation between his daughter and Doutrelaise at a concert in the Champs-Elysées, and he felt a wholesome dread of Mozart. He was on the point of rising to take Arlette away, when Courtaumer, to avert the danger, hastily resumed the conversation that François had interrupted.

"It certainly isn't necessary for me to assure you that I am quite at your service, count," he began, "but I don't exactly see how I can be of any assistance to you. The undertaking you speak of is quite beyond my powers, and can only be accomplished with machinery of which I have no knowledge whatever, being no engineer."

"You are a sailor," was M. de la Calprenède's quick reply.

"That's true, and I even flatter myself that I am thoroughly acquainted with my profession, but I cannot understand how this knowledge would be of any service to you in working a submarine gold mine."

"But I assure you that your assistance is indispensable to the execution of my plans, and I will explain why, although very briefly, for it is late, and Arlette must be tired," said the count, who was dividing his attention between his daughter and the drawing-room door.

"Do you propose forming a company for the recovery of this treasure?"

"I had thought of doing so, but, on reflection, I decided it would not be advisable. In the first place, I should not care to be known as the conductor of an enterprise of this kind. I have lost a good deal of money in business enterprises, there is no denying that, but I don't wish to be accused of involving others in loss. Besides, the public generally wouldn't believe in the existence of those millions."

"That's very true. In Paris, people are credulous and suspicious by turns. And since the failure of the scheme for the recovery of the galleons in the Bay of Vigo, such enterprises have not been regarded with much favour."

"I am quite of your opinion; besides, even if such a company were formed, I should only derive a very meagre profit from the secret I possess. I want all or nothing. If I share the profits, it will only be with a chosen friend who can help me; in short, with yourself, my dear Jacques."

"I am very grateful to you for having thought of me, but I really don't feel that I ought to accept such a princely gift," said Courtaumer, as seriously as he could. "Six millions would be very welcome if I had earned them, but unfortunately I have no means of acquiring them in any legitimate way."

"On the contrary, you have all the requisites I lack. You know how to

manage a ship, and you possess ample capital to conduct the submarine explorations which will enrich us."

"My capital has been greatly reduced. All the property I now own wouldn't yield more than two hundred and fifty thousand francs, and heaven only knows what the recovery of these chests of gold would cost!"

"Almost nothing. It is only necessary to hire for a month or two one of those small steam-tugs which can be found in any port, to hire or purchase divers' costumes, and engage a dozen men whom we shall only be obliged to pay while we are at work."

"What! do you think it can be so easily accomplished as that? I thought a great deal of time, money, and labour would be required."

"You forget that the vessel was wrecked but a couple of years ago, so that no excavating will be necessary, especially as the bed of the ocean at that point is solid rock. I calculate that the expense will not exceed fifty thousand francs. It is true, however, that I have not that amount by me."

"I have, although I am by no means rich, and I should be very glad to place the sum at your disposal. My time is also at your service, but—"

"But what?"

"I decline any share in the profits. Oh, don't protest, count; I will allow you to repay me the money advanced for expenses, and I shall be greatly the gainer. Remember that, judging from all appearances, *buccarat* will cost me a great deal more if I remain in Paris."

"You are too generous, my dear Jacques—"

"Wait, there is one condition, however."

"I accept it in advance, whatever it may be."

"Then, I am your man, providing you will allow me to reveal my stipulation only when success has been achieved. I will add, however, that it has no connection whatever with money. I shall ask a favour that you can grant without opening your purse."

As he spoke, Jacques glanced at Mademoiselle de la Calprenède, who had closed her music-book, and who was evidently preparing to leave the piano. The count divined that the request was in some way connected with his daughter, and his face brightened up, for to marry Arlette to M. de Court-aumer was his most fondly cherished dream. "I take you at your word," he exclaimed, "and to seal the bargain, I will tell you my secret. The vessel was wrecked upon a rock situated—"

"You shall tell me all this to-morrow, if you will allow me to call on you in the afternoon," interrupted the ex-lieutenant. "We are agreed, and your word is quite sufficient. What good would it do to refer now to some details which you cannot explain fully to me until our next interview? Allow me now to rejoin my friend Doutrelaise, who must need me, I think, as that old simpleton Frangois summoned me first. I am anxious to know what is going on in the ante-room, to which Doutrelaise just repaired if I am not greatly mistaken."

"Certainly," was the count's gracious response. "It is late, and I am going to take leave of your aunt. I shall expect a visit from you to-morrow."

"And I shall not disappoint you," replied Jacques, as he rose to steal out of the room. For Doutrelaise had not reappeared, and Jacques was saying to himself: "Matapan must certainly be at the bottom of all this."

XIII.

IN the anteroom Jacques found Francois who evinced unmistakeable signs of intense agitation. When questioned as to what had become of Doutrelaise, the old valet replied that he had left the house in company with a person who had called for him, and who on going away had said: "Ask Monsieur de Courtaumer to join me at Monsieur Doutrelaise's residence on the Boulevard Haussmann, as soon as possible. I must see him without fail on a matter of great importance."

Jacques subjected Francois to a searching examination, but only succeeded in eliciting unsatisfactory replies. The man who called had given his name—a name which Francois, in his excitement, had almost forgotten, for he murdered it so in repeating it that Jacques did not remember having ever heard it before, and yet this name had produced such an extraordinary effect on Doutrelaise, that he had immediately left the whist-table and gone off without even taking leave of anyone. "What did the man who called here look like?" asked Jacques.

"More like a bailiff than anything else. He was certainly not a gentleman, and you will excuse me for indulging in such a supposition, sir, but if your friend was in debt, I should think the man had come to take him to Clichy."

"You are behind the times, Francois. Imprisonment for debt was abolished twenty years ago; besides, Monsieur Doutrelaise owes no one. Give me my overcoat, hat, and cane." While Francois was assisting him in putting on his overcoat, Jacques added: "You must tell my aunt that Monsieur Doutrelaise was sent for in great haste by one of his friends who is very ill, and who also summoned me, for I suppose that such is the case; and above all, avoid speaking of the absurd fancies you mentioned to me just now."

With these words, Jacques hastened down the stairs and into the street. A cab was passing; he stopped it, sprung in, and ordered the driver to take him to the Boulevard Haussmann with all possible speed. Still, the drive seemed a long one, and before he arrived, he had plenty of time to indulge in conjectures. "May I be hanged if I can guess what this abrupt departure means!" he muttered. "To rush off without saying a word to anyone, not even to Mademoiselle de la Calprenède, or to me! It is enough to make one think the fellow mad. It was only with the greatest difficulty that I persuaded my aunt to invite him. He had this one opportunity to show himself at his best, and instead of profiting by it, he runs away. I am very much afraid that he has spoiled his prospects forever. But after all, it isn't his fault," resumed Courtaumer, following his train of thought. "It is evident that something important has occurred. But what? A duel is not arranged in such a manner. A man doesn't come to challenge an adversary in a drawing-room where he is spending the evening; he doesn't carry him off immediately as if his instant appearance on the ground were a necessity. Nor have men been known to fight a duel at eleven o'clock at night. And yet, I recollect that when Doutrelaise arrived he told me he had just had a violent altercation with Matapan. This is the result of it, perhaps. The old rascal never does anything like other people. He is quite capable of proposing single combat in his rooms, with daggers or even axes. Doutrelaise ought to have pooh-poohed any such proposition, but if he has been so foolish as to accept, I shall interfere, and between us we shall certainly make this eccentric somnambulist listen to reason."

The Boulevard Haussmann is not a short thoroughfare by any means ; and the baron's house was situated near the further end ; moreover, the horse that was drawing Jacques to his destination was not a very spirited animal. Indeed, it took at least twenty-five minutes to cover the distance. Jacques fairly stamped with impatience, and when the vehicle at last stopped, he cleared the space between it and the doorway at a single bound.

The door was instantly opened, and on crossing the threshold he found the hall has brilliantly lighted up as if a ball were going on in the house. This illumination was the more remarkable from the fact that the gas was usually extinguished at eleven o'clock in Baron Matapan's house. Yet another surprise awaited Courtaumer. Marchefroid, the doorkeeper, who was usually seated in his room, solemnly reading his radical paper—Marchefroid, the majestic Marchefroid, was standing at his door in the attitude of a soldier on guard.

"Monsieur Doutrelaise just came in, did he not ?" inquired Courtaumer.

"Yes, sir, but he is not at home."

This strange reply was made in a sulky tone which greatly displeased Courtaumer, who had no great affection for the baron's factotum. "What do you mean by that ?" he asked angrily. "Are you mocking me ?"

"Believe me, sir, I am incapable of such rudeness," replied Marchefroid, with ironical politeness.

"I don't care for any of your excuses. Has Monsieur Doutrelaise returned, yes or no ?"

"He came in about three quarters of an hour ago, and—not alone."

"I know. Some one called for him. I am going up."

"I have a bit of advice to give you, and that is, not to tire yourself by climbing to the fourth floor."

"Will you have done with your stupid jests, you rascal ! Where is Monsieur Doutrelaise ?"

"In Baron Matapan's apartment ; but I am by no means certain that you can see him."

"Is this intended as another joke ? Matapan won't have the audacity to keep him a prisoner, I suppose ; and if he tries to keep me from seeing him, he will have some trouble."

"You know very well he would do nothing of the kind," was Marchefroid's answer. "Indeed, I think you will be admitted ; but to save you any possible trouble at the door, these gentlemen will accompany you."

On hearing the words "these gentlemen," Courtaumer perceived two rather shabbily-dressed men, who had previously kept themselves in the background, advance from behind the doorkeeper. This strange apparition surprised him beyond measure. They did, indeed, strongly resemble *huissiers*, and if it were one of them who had come to summon Doutrelaise, no wonder that François had been incensed that such an individual should have ventured to present himself at Madame de Vervins' house. "There is no necessity for any one to accompany me," said Courtaumer, turning his back upon the doorkeeper, "and when I come down again, I shall teach you not to be insolent, Master Marchefroid." He hastened towards the staircase, and he was already ascending it when he perceived that one of the two men was following him. This incident gave him food for reflection. What did these men want ? The only case in which a house is guarded and its visitors watched is when a crime has been committed. "Can Matapan have killed some one ?" thought Courtaumer. "I shouldn't be sorry to hear it, for in that case the authorities would rid us of him."

On reaching the door he rang, but not without considerable perturbation. The door opened, but no one appeared to receive him. The man who was following him was not far off. Courtaumer entered without honouring him with even a glance, and the door closed as it had opened—that is to say, as if by magic. Jacques had never previously set foot in the baron's apartments, and this strange way of opening and closing the doors did not astonish him so much, as the eccentric landlord might have provided his apartments with invisible machinery intended to take the place of servants. But this illusion only lasted for a moment; for on turning round, Jacques found himself in the presence of an individual who seemed to belong to the same class as Marchefroid's body-guard. The young fellow was on the point of questioning this individual, when three cautious raps resounded at the door, and the man inside hastened to open it for the comrade who had followed Courtaumer upstairs. This comrade entered the apartment, and the door was then closed a second time. "Do you wish to see Monsieur Matapan?" inquired the man who admitted Jacques.

"No," replied Courtaumer, "I wish to speak with one of my friends who is here, at least so the doorkeeper informed me. I mean Monsieur Doutrelaise, who lives in the house; I don't understand, however, why he is in Monsieur Matapan's apartments."

"You will soon be informed. What is your name?"

"That is no concern of yours. If Monsieur Doutrelaise is here, please go and call him. I wish to see him."

"That is impossible just now; he is engaged."

"I tell you he expects me."

The man shrugged his shoulders, as if to say: "What does that matter to me?"

"And who, pray, are you?" exclaimed Courtaumer. "Why do you presume to interfere? Are you one of Baron Matapan's servants?"

"I! a servant? Oh, no," replied the man, laughing.

"It is true you don't look like one. But let us put an end to this farce. Tell me whom I have to deal with."

"Wait. My comrade will announce you, and perhaps you will be admitted."

"Well, make way whoever you may be! I am not at your Matapan's orders, and I shall not dance attendance in his ante-chamber." Thereupon, before either of the men could prevent him, Courtaumer darted to a door opposite to him, flung it open, and cried: "Doutrelaise, are you here?"

The adjoining room was brilliantly lighted up, but it was empty. Courtaumer entered without the slightest hesitation. The two men followed him, and one of them placed himself before him in such a way as to prevent him from advancing further. "You cannot pass!" exclaimed the other.

Courtaumer, in his anger, was about to resort to pugilism, when a person whom he instantly recognised entered the room, and the aspect of things suddenly changed. It was the commissary of police whom he had gone for a few days previously to convince him of the baron's somnambulism, and who had displayed so much sagacity throughout the affair. "What!" exclaimed Jacques, "was it you, sir, who summoned my friend? What has happened that your services should be required a second time? Has Matapan done something criminal in one of his fits of somnambulism?"

"No, it is not that—unfortunately," replied the commissary.

"Unfortunately, you say! What worse thing can have happened?"

Before replying, the commissary dismissed the men in waiting with a

gesture, and closed the door by which Courtaumer had entered. "They are detectives, I suppose," said Jacques.

"Yes, but do not be alarmed. I brought them only for form's sake--because it is customary in such cases."

"What do you mean? Has any crime been committed here?"

"I hope not, but the situation is this: Monsieur Matapan has disappeared."

"Disappeared? Since when? Doutrelaise told me only a short time ago that he had just had a violent altercation with the scoundrel."

"Monsieur Doutrelaise has told me the same thing, and it is for this very reason that I have been obliged to attach importance to a letter which Monsieur Matapan's servant sent to the authorities."

"A letter! Who wrote it?"

"Monsieur Matapan. Here it is, pray read it," said the commissary, drawing a folded paper from his pocket.

Courtaumer, more perplexed than ever, opened the letter, and read as follows: "I have the honour to inform the judicial authorities that my life has been threatened by Monsieur Doutrelaise, my tenant, on account of a dispute which has taken place between us respecting some recent events. He has challenged me to fight a duel without witnesses, in a house at Neuilly, on the banks of the Seine. He insists that this duel shall take place immediately, and I have consented, as he has grievously insulted me. I am now ready to start for the scene of the conflict, but as I have reason to believe that Monsieur Doutrelaise intends to murder me, I have written to one of my friends, who will repair to the spot to act as an umpire. Still, as he may not arrive in time, I have ordered Ali, my faithful servant, to deliver this letter at the office of the public prosecutor, in case I have not returned to my residence on the Boulevard Haussmann by nine o'clock this evening. And in that case, I ask that a search may be immediately made at my villa on the Boulevard d'Argenson. Ali, my servant, knows where it is, and has the keys. I should have applied to the police to protect me against this furious lunatic who is resolved to have my life, but there are insults which a brave man cannot tolerate, and which he feels obliged to avenge. I shall perhaps fall in a combat which has become inevitable. If such should be my fate, I am anxious that the facts which preceded the duel should be known, and that the crime, if crime there be, should not go unpunished."

That was all. Courtaumer returned the letter to the commissary, and shrugging his shoulders said: "This effusion lacks common sense. Whom does Matapan hope to convince that Doutrelaise has lured him into a trap in order to kill him?"

"I do not believe it for one," replied the commissary, "and shall not do so until I have positive proof of it. Nevertheless, this evening I received orders to investigate the matter without loss of time. I was selected for this duty as I had charge of the other affair in which Monsieur Matapan was concerned. My superiors thought there might be some connection between the two, and I accepted the task with pleasure, in the hope of enabling your friend to prove that he is entirely free from blame."

"But Matapan's story is absurd. In what times do we live that a magistrate should pay any serious attention to such nonsense!"

"Every charge must be investigated, at least to a certain extent; I began by warning Monsieur Doutrelaise, who I learnt was spending the evening at the house of Madame de Vervins'. I hastened there at once, and

asked to see Monsieur Doutrelaise, who was perfectly willing to accompany me here in order to contradict certain assertions made by Monsieur Matapan's servant. They are now together, and, to show you how much I am inclined to be your friend, I don't object to your being present at this confrontation."

"Confrontation!" exclaimed Courtaumer, "and detectives everywhere! I find two in the door-keeper's room and one here. It seems to me, sir, that my friend is treated like a prisoner."

"You are mistaken, sir," replied the commissary, "I must have members of the police force at hand, as I am compelled to search the house at Neuilly."

"What! you attach any importance to this absurd story of a duel without witnesses—and you are going to Neuilly to see if you can find Matapan's corpse there?"

"May be some other commissary has been deputized to visit the villa on the Boulevard d'Argenson while I am investigating the case here, for prompt action was insisted upon. In that case I shall be informed of the result of the search at Neuilly this evening, for I explained to my superiors the manner in which I proposed to proceed, beginning by questioning Monsieur Doutrelaise and Baron Matapan's valet."

"Then begin at once, for Doutrelaise won't feel very much flattered at being left *tête-à-tête* with a lackey; and since you will kindly permit me to be present at the examination, I am entirely at your service. Make use of me in any way. If you need any errands done, call on me; I will act as your messenger."

"Heaven preserve me from profiting by your obliging offer," replied the magistrate, laughing. "People would not fail to say that I was taking your friend's part; and I have already been censured for disobeying rules, in the first affair."

"That is rather hard—for I don't know how we should have proved the absurdity of the accusation against Julien de la Calpendre, if you had not assisted us in proving that Matapan was a somnambulist."

"You are right, my dear sir; a thousand times right; but in judicial matters there is a certain amount of routine—"

"Which is contrary to common sense. That is true, and I bow before this stupid divinity."

"Oh, there is a way of managing matters. I can assume the responsibility of certain proceedings without failing in my duty; and I have always felt such unbounded respect and esteem for your brother that I was willing even to compromise myself a little, if necessary, to prevent your friend from being treated unjustly. However, Monsieur Doutrelaise knows that you are here. He recognised your voice, and must be awaiting my return with impatience. Don't let us keep him waiting any longer." And with these words the commissary opened the door of the baron's smoking-room—the apartment where he had entertained Giromon, and where they had compared their reminiscences of the past and laid their plans for the future.

Courtaumer was rather amazed on beholding the soft cushions heaped upon the divans; the Turkish pipes and nargheels, the small low tables, inlaid with mother-of-pearl; the richly ornamented lamps hanging from the ceiling, all of which forcibly reminded him of the abodes he had visited at Constantinople and Cairo. The room seemed to have been very recently occupied. The lamps were lighted, the decanters but half empty, and there was a strong scent of resin, incense, and Oriental tobacco. One would

have sworn that the owner had just stepped out. Doutrelaisc, in evening dress, and Ali, in a red and gold livery, looked strange indeed amid these surroundings. They were both standing, Doutrelaisc near a window, and Ali near the door opening into the passage, and the glances they exchanged were not of a friendly character by any means. "Here you are at last!" Doutrelaisc exclaimed on perceiving Jacques. "I was sure you would come, but I hoped you would come sooner."

"I came as quickly as I could," replied Courtaumer. "I realised that something of importance must have occurred, and that you would no doubt need me, but I could not leave Monsieur de la Calprenède too abruptly. Well, it seems that Matapan has been trying to get even with you by pretending that you have laid a plot to assassinate him."

"When you arrived, Monsieur de Courtaumer," said the commissary, "I was just going to ask Monsieur Doutrelaisc to tell me what passed between him and the baron yesterday. I waited until he was in the presence of the baron's servant before questioning him, because this servant asserts certain things which will perhaps be contradicted by your friend's testimony."

"My story will be brief and simple," said Doutrelaisc. "To my very great astonishment, Monsieur Matapan called upon me at about four o'clock this afternoon. I ordered my servant to admit him, and I asked him what he wanted, whereupon he began to abuse me in the most outrageous manner for the part I took in that affair the other night. I answered him as he deserved to be answered, and ordered him to leave the room at once. Thereupon, his language became so insulting that I lost my temper. If he had confined himself to insulting me, I should perhaps have succeeded in preserving my self-control, but he spoke of another person in such terms that I lost all patience. You probably won't compel me to repeat what he said, or give the name of the person he insulted."

"That is unnecessary," replied the commissary. "I understand what you mean, for I was present the other night when Monsieur Matapan indulged in a base insinuation. Pray continue."

"Acting upon the impulse of the moment, an impulse to which I now regret having yielded, I raised my hand to strike him but he hastily stepped aside, and my fingers only grazed his cheek. I thought he would rush upon me, and I hastily caught up a revolver which happened to be lying within my reach : but Monsieur Matapan did not attempt to employ his superior physical strength."

"He was afraid of receiving a bullet."

"I don't know whether he was afraid, but I was greatly surprised by his conduct. He did not move, but he said to me with extraordinary coolness: 'You owe me satisfaction, and I demand it instantly.' It is probable that he came on purpose to insult me, and that he was only waiting for a gesture from me to propose a duel."

"Then you assert that the challenge came from him?" asked the commissary.

"I swear it, though he asserts the contrary in the absurd production you showed me. This all happened quite naturally, as you see. I owed him satisfaction, and I asked nothing better than to grant it. I replied that his seconds might confer to-morrow morning with Monsieur Jacques de Courtaumer, who would serve as one of mine."

"With pleasure," muttered Jacques.

"It was then that Monsieur Matapan made the extraordinary suggestion that we should fight this evening in a country house which he owns, it seems, on the Boulevard d' Argenson, at Neuilly. He declared that he would

never sleep with a blow unavenged, and uttered many other similar absurdities. I replied that such encounters did not take place at night, and that I was not inclined to take a trip to Neuilly to please him. He insisted, whereupon I laughed in his face, and finally he went away, informing me that he should await me at his villa—he took care to give me the full address—where I should find him at eight o'clock with his seconds, adding that if I did not make my appearance by that hour he should consider me a coward, and would proclaim abroad that I had shrunk from an encounter with him."

"Your explanation contradicts the baron's letter from beginning to end," said the commissary. "Will you have the kindness to tell me what you did after sending Monsieur Matapan away?"

"Monsieur Matapan left me at about a quarter past four," replied Doutrelaise. "Our interview did not last ten minutes. I was greatly perplexed, and felt anxious to consult a friend, so I dressed myself as quickly as possible, and went in search of Monsieur Jacques de Courtaumer. I had been invited to spend the evening at his aunt's, but I wished to see him somewhere else than in Madame de Vervins' drawing-room. I went to his own rooms in the Rue de Castiglione but he was not there. Thence I went to the club, where I was equally unsuccessful. Quite at a loss, I then decided to go and dine at the Café Anglais where I found a gentleman with whom my friend Jacques is well acquainted—Cordier, our old college chum."

"I thought he was living in the United States," said Courtaumer.

"He has been residing in San Francisco for five years or more, and has made a large fortune there. He is now returning to America, after spending a fortnight in Paris, to attend to some business matters. He sails from Havre this morning. He embraced me, and declared that I must dine with him, and indeed I had nothing better to do, as I could not find you. At half-past eight we finished our dinner, and I thought myself free, but he literally forced me to accompany him to the hotel to fetch his trunk as he meant to leave by the nine forty-five train. It was then too early to go to Madame de Vervins, and he was going to the Hôtel du Louvre—which was on my way—so I allowed myself to be persuaded."

"I would wager a handsome amount that you also accompanied him to the station," said Jacques.

"I was foolish enough to do so."

"I knew it. You would lose your fortune to oblige a friend."

"I have, perhaps, lost something even more precious than that this evening," murmured Doutrelaise.

"So you are in a position to prove that your evening has been spent in the manner you have described?" inquired the commissary, who had listened to this narrative with close attention.

"Yes; at least up to half past eight o'clock. The head waiter, who served us at the Café Anglais, knows me very well, and will remember having seen me. On leaving there we took a cab. I did not enter the Hôtel du Louvre, but waited in the vehicle for Cordier. At the Saint Lazare railway station, where we arrived much too early, I promenaded up and down the waiting-room with him. He had my arm, and did not leave me until the passengers were summoned to the train. And even then," added Doutrelaise, turning to Courtaumer, "he ran after me to tell me to give his regards to you, and to ask you to excuse him for not having called on you during his stay in Paris. He was not aware that you were here."

"I can readily excuse him," replied Jacques; "but really you did very

wrong to allow him to monopolize you to such an extent. I know, of course, that you could not foresee Monsieur Matapan's nefarious scheme, but it would have been much better for you to have bestowed your attention on more than one person—”

“At what hour will Monsieur Cordier sail?” inquired the commissary. “Would there be time for your friend to receive a telegram, sent in the morning?”

“Undoubtedly; only I forgot to ask him where he intended stopping.”

“That doesn't matter. He will be found if I telegraph to one of my Havre colleagues,” said the commissary.

This remark made Courtaumer start. “Ah!” he exclaimed. “You intend then, to continue the investigation of this absurd affair, as you consider it necessary to have the testimony of this Californian, who unfortunately happened to engross my friend's time and attention this evening.”

“I am obliged to be prepared for any emergency,” replied the commissary, rather coldly; “besides if I receive an order, I am obliged to execute it.”

“It will be difficult to find a judge sufficiently stupid to believe that Doutrelaise has made away with Matapan. Besides, if this old scoundrel has been killed, his carcass will be found somewhere; however I am certain that the rascal is enjoying the best possible health at this very moment.”

Courtaumer was certainly no diplomatist, and his language was not very well calculated to please the commissary; however the latter took no notice of Jacques impetuous remarks but turned to Doutrelaise and said, “You will permit me to give Monsieur Matapan's servant a hearing now.”

Ali had not moved a muscle while Doutrelaise was telling his story, but had stood with his head erect, his arms folded, and a mocking smile upon his lips. “What have you to say?” inquired the magistrate.

“I must first tell you what my master was thinking for three days past,’ rejoined the servant in broken language. “He believes that Monsieur Doutrelaise was plotting against him to avenge a remark he had made. He said to me a dozen times or more: ‘If anything happens to me, it will certainly be that gentleman's fault.’”

“You need not repeat the conversation; simply state the facts if you please. What occurred yesterday?”

“Yesterday at about four o'clock in the afternoon, the baron told me he was going up to the fourth floor to see this gentleman, who had sent for him.”

“That is a gross falsehood,” interrupted Doutrelaise. “I had not addressed a word, either spoken or written, to Monsieur Matapan since the scene the other night. Besides, is it at all likely that Monsieur Matapan would have accepted such an invitation from me, whom he regarded as an enemy? Even if I had conceived the ridiculous idea of asking him to come upstairs, he would probably have answered by requesting me to come down.”

“Of course,” exclaimed Courtaumer.

“Go on,” said the magistrate, addressing the valet who had not seemed to notice Doutrelaise's response.

“The baron returned in about twenty minutes' time and seemed greatly agitated. He said to me: ‘I have just been insulted, and I am to fight this evening at Neuilly. I am going out now, because I must find a second. I don't wish to meet Monsieur Doutrelaise without witnesses. He suggested such an arrangement to me, but I have no confidence in his integrity, and I fear he is setting a trap for me.’”

“That is exactly what he would have done for you, my dear fellow, had

you been green enough to consent to the arrangement he proposed," growled Courtaumer.

"After telling me this, the baron wrote a letter, dressed himself entirely in black, put on a low felt hat—and afterwards ordered me to place his swords in a cab which he had sent me to fetch. Before he went away, he gave me the letter he had written, ordering me to take it to the Palais de Justice at nine o'clock precisely—in case he had not returned at that hour."

"And you have not seen him since?"

"Alas, no, sir, and I am sure he is dead, for never before, since I have been in his employment, has he spent a single night out of his own bed."

"Why, he wandered around all night, and was everywhere excepting in his bed?" cried Courtaumer, sneeringly.

"I am not speaking to you," replied Ali, unabashed.

"How happens it that you did not accompany your master to Neuilly?" inquired the commissary gravely. "You seem to be greatly attached to him, and you knew that he might incur great danger."

"I begged and entreated him to allow me to go with him, but he forbade my doing so, and I could only obey him. Besides, I knew he would trust no one else to deliver the letter he had written."

"It was your duty to have warned the commissary of the district. But you can at least tell me the name of the person who served as Monsieur Matapan's second?"

"Unfortunately I don't know it. The baron was not in the habit of talking to me about his affairs."

"But you knew his friends."

"No, sir, for they never came here?"

At this moment one of the detectives guarding the door entered the room and whispered a few words to the magistrate. "Gentlemen," said the commissary, as the man turned on his heels, "my colleague, who has just returned from Neuilly, is downstairs. I am about to hear the result of the expedition to Monsieur Matapan's villa. Please wait for me here." With these words the magistrate hastened from the room, leaving the two friends alone with Ali, who ostentatiously turned his back upon them as he retreated to his chosen position near the door leading into the corridor. They felt no inclination to enter in a conversation with him, and by common consent they retired to the embrasure of a window.

"Can you imagine what motive induced Matapan to concoct this absurd conspiracy?" asked Doutrelaise.

"He wanted to get you into trouble, of course," replied Jacques.

"It cannot possibly have any serious result. No one will believe that I have murdered him."

"The judges will not, but how about the public? A slander is never lost. People will whisper to each other what he loudly proclaimed, that you hated him because he had discovered you hiding in Monsieur de la Calprenède's apartments, and that you killed him to prevent him from divulging the fact."

"But what could have been his object?"

"In the first place, he wasn't sorry to cause you annoyance, and in this, he has succeeded admirably. An investigation has begun, and the police are at work. The house is full of them. There were two in the door-keeper's room when I arrived. Marchefroid is jubilant, and to-morrow all the Bourleroys will share his delight. You will have everybody against you,

even Monsieur de la Calprenède, who will be furious when he hears of this scandal."

"And his son as well," remarked Doutrelaise, sadly. "Julien is highly incensed with me, and he will leave prison to-morrow."

"I will have a talk with him. Besides, there is Mademoiselle Arlette. You ask me what Matapan's object could be : to prevent you from marrying her, my dear fellow. His suit has been rejected ; he cannot have her himself, and he doesn't want anybody else to succeed ; and so he has laid this plot to lower you in the estimation of the father and the daughter as well."

"That is probable, and I am afraid he will succeed. But for this charge to be taken seriously, it would be necessary for Matapan to remain invisible."

"Well, I shouldn't be at all surprised if the old scoundrel had planned a permanent disappearance. He recently met a rascal who scoured the seas with him in former years, and they have perhaps made up their minds to resume their former vocation."

"That's hardly likely. Matapan is the owner of this house."

"But there is nothing to prevent him from turning it over to an agent, and receiving the rent, even if he were in China."

"And the money and valuables concealed here, do you believe him capable of relinquishing them?"

"The question is, whether he has not removed them within the last few days? Monsieur de la Calprenède told me yesterday that the baron had taken away all the articles secreted in the wall of Julien's study, and I have learned through my brother that the rascal has claimed the famous opal necklace, and that it has been returned to him."

"Quite so ; I myself returned him the fragment which was in my possession."

"Ah, well, my dear friend, his eagerness to obtain possession of his treasures shows that he meant to abscond."

At this moment the commissary of police returned. "Of course nothing has been found?" exclaimed the ex-lieutenant, unceremoniously.

"You are mistaken, sir," replied the magistrate, coldly. "On the contrary, there are abundant proofs of Monsieur Matapan's visit to his Neuilly villa. The lower floor was still lighted up, and two swords were found lying on the floor of the dining-room, which was stained with blood."

"I knew it! My poor master is dead!" groaned Ali, with frantic gesticulations of grief.

"Bah! his nose has bled, that's all. I am very sure no corpse was found on the scene of the pretended conflict."

"No," replied the commissary, "but footsteps were observed in the garden—footsteps that led to a small gate near the river bank. The house is very near the Seine."

"That's capital!" exclaimed Courtaumer, laughing heartily. "My friend Doutrelaise, after killing the unfortunate Matapan, took his body upon his shoulders and threw it into the Seine. Doutrelaise is very strong, and very adroit as well ; but he is in evening dress, with a black coat and a white cravat, and after all this exertion he still looks as if he had just stepped out of a bandbox. There isn't a crease in his clothing, or a speck of mud on his polished boots."

"Gentlemen," rejoined the commissary, "I have requested my colleague to make his report, and to allow me to complete the investigation. I shall

do so to-morrow, but there is nothing more to be done here now. Will you follow me?"

"Don't you think, sir, that it would be as well to ascertain what the baron has done with the valuables he kept concealed in this wall?" inquired Courtaumer. "Perhaps his faithful servant can give us some information on the subject."

"If you refer to the cupboard in which the baron sometimes deposited his valuables for safe keeping," said Ali, "I can show the commissary that it is empty. Two or three days ago my master came to the conclusion that his valuables were no longer safe here, and so he deposited them at some bank."

"Or elsewhere," muttered Jacques.

"Very well," said the magistrate, addressing the valet. "You will be examined to-morrow. I should advise you not to leave the house until you receive your summons. Come, gentlemen," he added, passing into the next room.

Ali did not reply or move; and the commissary, finding himself alone with the two friends, remarked, after careful consideration: "I feel certain that all this is the result of a scheme concocted by Monsieur Matapan to injure Monsieur Doutrelaise. The deception is apparent, and will soon be revealed beyond all doubt; but it is my duty to investigate the facts, and I advise you to be prudent until the mystery is cleared up. Abstain from any action whatever, and don't answer if any one questions you. Wait until I have seen my superiors, and have acquainted them with certain information which I have collected respecting Monsieur Matapan. I don't believe that he is dead—in fact, I am sure he will reappear, if only to claim his valuables."

"I see that Doutrelaise's case is in good hands," exclaimed Courtaumer, in delight. "You have no further need of us, I presume, sir?"

"No, gentlemen, I am going away, and will detain you no longer."

When Doutrelaise found himself again upon the staircase with Courtaumer, the latter gaily said: "Let us go up to your rooms. I want to have a talk with you. Everything promises well."

"On the contrary, after what has just occurred, I have nothing to hope for," murmured Doutrelaise.

"Bah!" exclaimed Courtaumer; "all roads lead to Rome, and Matapan's abominable conspiracies may perhaps bring about your marriage with Mademoiselle de la Calprenède. I am almost certain that you will have cause to be grateful to this scamp, sooner or later on. Everything will turn out for the best."

"I greatly fear that you are mistaken," replied Doutrelaise. "There is no hope of keeping the affair a secret. The hall is still lighted up, and I can hear Marchefroid talking. He is evidently waiting to see me pass his door, in the custody of two policemen. Nor should I be surprised if he had informed all the inmates of the house, and invited them to witness the delightful spectacle. When Julien was arrested, it was done much more quietly. I have been treated far worse than he was."

"With this difference, however: Julien was taken to prison, where he still remains; while you are quietly returning to your rooms, where you must give me shelter for the night."

"Very gladly, although I have only a sofa to offer you."

"I shall be much more comfortable there than in the cabin of the 'Juno,' where I slept for three long years; besides, I have no desire to pass out

under the malicious scrutiny of the doorkeeper and the detectives who are keeping him company. I am very much excited, and if he dropped any word that didn't suit me, I might fly at his throat, and get myself locked up. I shouldn't much mind about it; but although Adrien, thank Heaven! is no longer a magistrate, I owe him some consideration, and he wouldn't be much pleased to learn that his brother had been arrested for a breach of the peace."

"You are right; but the question is, whether you will be any calmer to-morrow morning."

"Yes, yes. Night brings counsel, you know. Let us go upstairs."

Doutrelaise at once assented, for he was in one of those moods in which a man experiences an intense desire to confide his troubles to a friend, receive his consolation, and listen to his advice. So they both wended their way to the fourth floor. On passing M. de la Calprenède's door, they found it closed. The count and his daughter must have already returned, and Doutrelaise reflected that they must have passed under a running fire of sneers, and perhaps gibes, from the rascally doorkeeper. On the third floor, where the Bourleroys resided, everybody was astir. Through the partially opened door the sound of voices was distinctly audible, and plainly enough Marchefroid had informed the family of what had occurred. They knew that the police were in the house, and that an unpopular neighbour would probably depart in custody. As Courtaumer passed by, he perceived Bourleroy senior, peering on to the landing. "Draw in your head, you old rascal!" exclaimed the ex-lieutenant. "If your wife saw you in that posture, she would think you were watching for your adored Lelia, Marchefroid's clumsy daughter." Bourleroy, detected in the act of playing the spy, quickly withdrew his head, and noiselessly closed the door. "Did you see him vanish?" inquired Jacques, as he and Doutrelaise reached the landing on the fourth floor. "The other night we killed two birds with one stone, when we discovered Matapan's somnambulistic propensities and our licentious old neighbour's escapades. I think we have nothing more to fear from the Bourleroys. If they show any inclination to criticise my friends, I have a very effectual means of closing their mouths."

But Doutrelaise was not in the mood for jesting. Without a word, he ushered his companion into the smoking room, where a good fire was burning, and where everything necessary for a bachelor's evening enjoyment was as usual in readiness. "They are all asleep in the count's apartments," remarked Jacques, approaching the window. "No, there is still a light in the last room, a very faint light, very like that kindled by a young girl whose heart is oppressed with grief, and who cannot sleep. But, never mind, my dear fellow, in two or three months the whole mansion will be illuminated, and there will be feasting and dancing in honour of your nuptials with the most charming lady of my acquaintance."

"You are mad!" exclaimed Doutrelaise.

"Not at all. Listen to me. You fancy that all is lost, that the father is your bitterest enemy, that the son is in league with him, and that their opposition will destroy the love that fills Mademoiselle Arlette's heart. You forget, my friend, that you have an ally in me."

"I know it; but what can you do against so many enemies?"

"I can do a great deal, for I am in their camp—at least, I have been so for two or three hours. You saw me conversing with the count at my aunt's house, and probably thought I was wasting my time. Not at all. No allusion was made to you, but the count made a proposition to me—a

proposition to which I shall give a formal assent to-morrow, when the contract or agreement will be signed. The fact is, he wishes me to recover twelve millions that belong to him, or to which he has purchased the sole right and title, for they are now resting under several fathoms of water. I shall not try to convince you that I am the only person in the world capable of accomplishing this extremely lucrative and difficult task; I will only say that I have decided to undertake it, and that if I succeed in it, I shall be in a position to impose any conditions whatever upon Monsieur de la Calprenède. It will cost me a good deal of trouble and not a little money, for I shall not only command the expedition, but advance the funds; still, I sha'n't regret the money and labour expended if I can conduct the affair to a successful termination, for you will be the one to reap the benefits of the victory."

"Your language is becoming less and less intelligible."

"No matter. Content yourself with answering the question I am going to put to you. In the first place, what course do you intend to pursue under the peculiar circumstances which have resulted from Matapan's accusation?"

"I shall wait until he reappears, and then treat him as he deserves. He asked for a duel; he shall have it."

"I will serve as your second with pleasure, but that was not what I meant. I was wondering what course of conduct you would pursue in regard to the Calprenèdes."

"I can only keep myself out of their way, and I don't suppose they will court my society."

"You are probably right, and I greatly doubt if my aunt will feel at all inclined to continue her attempts at a reconciliation. Heaven only knows what slanders she has heard about you already! As for Mademoiselle Arlette, she will certainly not allow herself to be influenced by these calumnies. She possesses great firmness, as well as constancy. She has proved this, since her attachment to you has successfully resisted the opposition of those around her. So you have nothing to fear on that side."

"What are you aiming at?"

"I wish to know if Paris has any great attraction for you, at the present time?"

"No; my life here was never particularly pleasant, and it has now become intolerable."

"Especially now that you may expect to be a trifle annoyed by the judicial authorities, for you will be examined again. Your past will be subjected to a minute investigation to ascertain if you were not guilty of some act of folly in your youth. I shouldn't be surprised if you were even placed under surveillance for a time."

"That is quite possible, and I would travel a thousand leagues to escape from such annoyances."

"It is not necessary to go so far. You have only to accompany me on board a fine steamer that I am going to hire—and which I shall command. It will take us to the coast of Brittany—Come, is it agreed? What is there to prevent your coming with me? Perhaps you are afraid that Mademoiselle de la Calprenède will be offended by your abrupt departure, and it would be impossible for you to bid her good-bye. But I will faithfully deliver any message you may desire to send to her, and when she learns the object of our expedition, she will approve of your decision. I can vouch for that."

"All my hopes have fled," replied Doutrelaise, sadly. "I can now only rely upon your friendship. Paris has become hateful to me; life is only a burden. I will go wherever you wish to go."

"Very good!" exclaimed Courtaumer. "To-morrow I will see the count, and I shall be able to decide whether the scheme to which I have vaguely alluded is a practicable one. I begin to hope that it is. I did not think so at first, but my faith increases with reflection. Don't ask me for the particulars until to-morrow evening, when we will dine together and come to a final decision. In the meantime, give me one of your Partagas, and enough rum to make myself a glass of punch—some of that which I brought you from Jamaica, if you have any of it left."

XIV.

"DOESN'T this little boat move along finely?" said Jacques de Courtamer to Albert Doutrelaise one pleasant January day, that is if any January day can be called pleasant on the coast of Brittany.

"So finely that we are bobbing about like so many dancing dervishes," murmured Albert, clinging with both hands to the railing of the bridge to which Jacques had compelled him to climb.

"Bah! you aren't sea sick, so you have no cause to complain: and, at our present rate of speed, we shall reach our destination in an hour. Then, you can land if you like, but I shall sleep on board, for I wish to superintend the first attempts. I know that you don't believe in our strange gold mine, but I do; and even if I am mistaken, we shall have had a delightful excursion."

"Do you think so? I can't say that I agree with you. It is three weeks since we left Paris one disagreeable evening by the express for Brest, where my only amusement consisted in promenading the public square and admiring the bay while I smoked innumerable cigars."

"And thought about Mademoiselle de la Calprenède. I would bet any amount that you saw her profile in each passing cloud. Come, you are not to be pitied after all. You would have been much worse off in Paris. Monsieur de la Calprenède isn't very kindly disposed towards you, or his son either. The day Julien left prison I had great difficulty in preventing him from picking a quarrel with you. And now instead of quarrelling, you are hastening the date of your marriage."

"You have repeated that remark at least a hundred times already, and when I ask you to explain yourself more clearly you only answer me evasively, so I cherish no foolish hopes. I accompanied you because I had nothing better to do, and because I felt that mine was a hopeless case."

"Not hopeless, by any means, my dear fellow. If Mademoiselle de la Calprenède could hear you she would tell you that you were sadly wanting in faith, and she would be right. Have you forgotten a certain interview she was kind enough to grant you on the evening before your departure, in the little square in front of the Church of Saint-Augustin? It seems to me that she urged you to accompany me, and swore that she would never change."

"Everything is subject to change, my friend," said Albert, sadly.

"It is her father's mind that will change—should we succeed."

"You say 'we,' as if I was likely to be of any use in this foolish undertaking."

"Don't trouble yourself about that. I will utilize your services, never fear."

"Still, I should like to know what I am to do?"

"You will know soon. Don't forget how wonderfully fortune has favoured us so far. We reached Brest without the slightest accident. I had been told that I could hire a steamer there, but I was by no means certain of it. The first thing my eyes fell upon was this steam yacht, which a Russian had left there last year, and which answered my purpose admirably. It is fitted up in the most luxurious manner; it skims over the waves like a sea-gull, and draws so little water that it can go anywhere. I hired it for a nothing, and if I decided to purchase it I could get it for a mere trifle. And to think that we owe this treasure to a golden-haired woman, who ruined the aforesaid Muscovite! She little knew how greatly she was contributing to the happiness of an excellent young man and a charming young girl."

"Jacques, you irritate me beyond endurance with your promises."

"Promises which will be kept; I'm sure of it. I have been receiving information ever since I have been in the neighbourhood, and I know beyond the shadow of a doubt, that a large vessel was wrecked not far from here about two years ago. The American sailor told the truth. We now have the consent of the French authorities, the English insurance companies cannot oppose us, and as I have engaged the best divers to be found in Brest, and taken lessons myself so that I can easily move about with twenty fathoms of water above my head, there is nothing to prevent our commencing operations. You must help me in regilding the Calprenède escutcheon; I want the count to be under obligations to you."

"But he doesn't even know I am here."

"No, as I prevailed on him to remain in Paris. It is supposed that you have gone to the south for your health. The commissary of police and my aunt alone are acquainted with the truth. By-the-way, did I tell you that a search is still being made for Baron Matapan, who is believed to have left France, and that my aunt has discovered that the famous opal necklace formerly belonged to an Indian rajah, whom Matapan killed in the Straits of Malacca? It seems that the worthy baron was once a pirate. He has probably taken up his abode in some distant land, that is, unless he has resumed his former profession, in which case we may reasonably hope he will some day be hanged. But, however that may be, we shall soon hear that his house is for sale."

The sky was cloudy, a stiff breeze was blowing, the shore was hidden from sight by a dense fog, and on every side innumerable rocks rose up grim and black above the foam-crested waves. It was, indeed, the immense and gloomy Atlantic, nowhere so stern and awe-inspiring as here on the rock bound coast of Brittany.

"Now, my friend," said Courtaumer, "let me explain matters, and acquaint you with my purpose. Having left the Brest roads and taken a northern course we have rounded Cape Saint-Mathieu, leaving on our larboard the Black Rocks, Beniguet, Molène, and Ouessant, and other dangerous points. It would be difficult to give you any idea of the number of vessels wrecked on this coast. One of my best comrades sleeps here. He was on board the 'Gorgon,' which went to pieces off the Black Rocks. Not a man on board escaped, and no one can exactly tell where the ship went down. After that are you surprised that an American vessel, loaded with gold, should be lost?"

"But not hereabouts, since we are still moving onward."

"Rather more northwards, my dear fellow, but not so far. The channel we have followed is called Le Four, which war vessels only venture into in the fairest weather. We have not only passed Cape Saint-Mathieu, but also Capes Kermorvan and Corsen. We have also passed Porspoder, a pretty seaport town, where gigantic lobsters cost but ten sous a piece, and the Isle of Yock, and other crags with equally heathenish names. There before is the Green Island, and that one with a stern forbidding aspect is called Bosseven. The channel between them is known as Relec Channel."

"I don't derive much satisfaction from these particulars."

"But in less than a week you will be as familiar with all these islands as you are with the Boulevard Haussmann, for it is in this immediate neighbourhood that we are going to establish ourselves."

"What a delightful prospect! We shall need all our philosophy. You can fish for gold while I fish for crabs."

"No jesting, if you please. Remember we did not come for pleasure, and our aim ought to be to succeed as quickly as possible. I will now explain my plan. We shall reach our destination in about half an hour, and that will be none too soon, for night is coming on, and I have no desire to steam among these rocks after dark. We shall anchor between Green Island, which I pointed out to you just now, and the Isle of Greem, on the left. There is a very good anchorage there, where our yacht will be perfectly safe, even in bad weather. Of course we shall remain on board. Now according to the information given to Monsieur de la Calprenède by the American sailor, the lost vessel must have struck upon one of those rocks that raise their black heads before us. I suspect that it came to grief upon that which is known as West Bosseven to distinguish it from another island of the same name lying considerably further out."

"Really, but why do we not anchor near Bosseven, if Bosseven is the spot?"

"Because that would be dangerous. There is no good anchorage there, while between the two islands I spoke of we shall be as safe as my aunt is when she shelters herself behind her Chinese screen. Besides, on the Isle of Greem there are plenty of hares and other game which will furnish sport. You can shoot all day if you don't care to watch the operations of our divers."

"It seems to me evident that you don't know the exact situation of the wreck."

"I shall know it by this time to-morrow, my dear fellow. I shall start out at daybreak, and my men will explore the depths of the ocean in search of the lost gold. Think of it! these millions belonged to a miner, a Californian who devoted twenty years to accumulating them, and who little suspected that he was working for a ruined nobleman."

"Keep your philosophical reflections for the day of success, and remember La Fontaine's fable. Wait until you have killed your bear before you sell his skin."

"Silence! You are a confounded pessimist. I won't take you to Bosseven. You would only irritate me and discourage my men."

"Very well. Then how am I to spend my time?"

"In thinking about Mademoiselle de la Calprenède. Won't that suffice? You are a very strange lover if you can't be content with hope, while waiting for something better. There will be nothing to disturb your reveries, as you will only see the sea and the sky."

"You are making fun of me, and that is unkind."

" Do you think I would laugh at your anxiety if I did not expect to allay it ? But seriously I sha'n't need your assistance for the first few days, and as I don't wish you to feel too sad you shall be taken on shore every morning, and you need not return until night unless you wish to do so."

" On shore ! And what, in heaven's name, am I to do there ? "

" Oh, Porsal is a dull place, but the surrounding country is charming. There is Saint-Pol-de-Léon near by—the quaintest old town imaginable. There is nothing to prevent you from going there. The grass grows as luxuriantly in the streets as in a meadow, and one can count as many graveyards as there are houses. Besides, without leaving Porsal, which will be our headquarters, you can visit the ruins of Trémazan Castle, which commands a fine view of the bay. Look ! you can see the tower from here ; a well preserved relic of military engineering art in the thirteenth century."

" I have no more taste for ruins than I have for graveyards."

" That's a pity. I thought you were somewhat of an archaeologist. Well, then, you shall make the acquaintance of the inhabitants of Porsal—excellent people and brave seamen. It would be a very good idea for one of us to cultivate the people on shore, for it is of the greatest importance that we should make no enemies. We must treat them whenever an opportunity to offer them a drink presents itself ; and we will promise to repair their church, which has been greatly damaged by the fierce tempests that prevail here. I want the entire population to pray for the success of our enterprise. But here we are at the channel, and though our pilot is thoroughly acquainted with his business, I am going to see that he doesn't run us on some rock in passing. It wouldn't be pleasant to meet with the same fate that befell the former owner of these chests of gold. Remain here, if you like. The sun is just setting. It is a sight which Paris cannot offer, and well worthy of your attention."

Courtaumer then went to the wheel, but Doutrelaise felt no desire to follow him. He knew nothing about steering ; and although a thorough Parisian he preferred to gaze upon the strange scene before him. On his right stretched a rugged broken shore ; around him broke tumultuous, foam-crested waves ; and on his left stretched the immensity of ocean—a watery waste extending as far as the eye could reach ; while the sun hung like a huge ball of molten iron in the western sky. For an instant, he yielded to the charm of the wild picture, then his thoughts flew away to a mansion on the Boulevard Haussmann, where his heart had lingered, and he was obliged to admit that the weird beauty of the sea moved him less than a single glance from Arlette, and that the modest light of her lamp was worth all the sunsets in the world.

Courtaumer, seizing the wheel with true nautical enthusiasm, had taken the pilot's place, and was proving that no better sailor had ever guided a vessel along that coast. He piloted the yacht in and out through the rocks with as much ease as if he was driving a phaeton along a straight road, and followed the intricate course with an accuracy that was rewarded with murmurs of approval from a crew composed of picked seamen, several of whom had served under him before. Three quarters of an hour after rounding the southern extremity of Green Island, the yacht was riding at anchor at a short distance from a lonely rocky shore. Courtaumer was not the man to despise material comforts, and he had laid in an abundant supply of choice provisions ; the wines, too, were excellent. A man who had formerly served as a cook on one of the French transatlantic steamers had been engaged, and in this, his first effort, he sur-

passed himself. At half past ten, the two friends were still at table, and Doutrelaise was finally obliged to laugh at the sallies of his incorrigible friend, who, after trying his best to make him intoxicated, had signally failed, Albert not being one of those lovers who drink to drown their disappointment and anxiety. At about eleven o'clock they went on deck for the laudable purpose of smoking a cigar before retiring to bed. The crew, surfeited with extra rations and supplementary glasses of grog, were already asleep, with the exception of the two men on watch. The night was dark and the sky starless, but the wind had changed. "We shall have fair weather to-morrow," said Jacques gaily. "There will be nothing to interfere with our work."

"What is that light over there?" asked Doutrelaise, pointing to a luminous speck in the surrounding gloom. "I thought there was no land in that direction.

"Land! no. That must have been lighted in honour of our arrival."

"It is on some fishing-boat, perhaps," suggested Doutrelaise.

"No. In the first place, fishing-boats that go out at night-time generally dispense with lights, besides this light is motionless. If it were on a boat, it would be dancing about."

"But I thought there were only a few isolated rocks on this side. If I am not mistaken we passed this spot on entering the channel."

"Quite so; and I must confess that I don't understand the meaning of this light. However, we will ask one of the men on watch. They know every pebble along these shores. Here, Ploarec!"

A sailor who was smoking his pipe near the gunwale, turned in answer to the summons. "Do you see that light?" said Courtaumer.

"Yes, captain," replied the man, raising his hand to his cap; "it is a lantern."

"Where is it?"

"On West Bosseven, captain."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Yes, captain; quite sure of it."

"What can any one be doing there?"

"Setting lobster-traps, sir."

"That's true. It must be a good place. I didn't think of that, and was surprised to see a lantern perched upon a rock which is as bare as my hand. We passed it, but the man had not moored his boat there then. Where can he have come from?"

"From Porsal, captain. He will go back home to-night, and return for his traps to-morrow."

"I presume he won't be sorry to sell me his fish. Thank you, Ploarec."

"I have listened, but I am not much wiser," remarked Doutrelaise, when the sailor had left them. "What does he mean by setting traps?"

"He means placing some willow baskets with bait for the capture of lobsters in the water. We can have some for dinner to-morrow."

"Indeed! I thought— An entirely different idea occurred to me. Wasn't it in the vicinity of that rock that the ship laden with gold went down?"

"And you imagined that the lantern was in the hands of some one else hunting for the millions? But that's improbable. Fishing for gold isn't as easy as fishing for lobsters; besides, if any one attempted to touch a wreck which is the property of Monsieur de la Calprenède, I should promptly put a stop to his unlawful depredations upon the count's domain.

So don't indulge in any such foolish delusions, but let us go to bed so as to be up early to-morrow."

Doutrelaise did not object to this arrangement, for he longed to be alone, so that he might dream of his inamorata. It was daybreak when Jacques entered his cabin to rouse him and inform him that the weather was all that could be desired. The long boat was in readiness and the apparatus and the men had already gone off. It was finally decided that after visiting the rock with his friend, Doutrelaise should spend the day on shore, returning to the yacht in time for dinner.

At about ten o'clock they reached Bosseven, a large rock, nearly circular in form, with a very uneven surface, tolerably level on one side, but rugged and precipitous on the other, where sharp, beetling crags abounded. Similar jagged rocks extended a long distance from the shore, but they were entirely under water, and it was probably upon the hidden ledge that the American vessel had struck. The water around was exceedingly deep. Courtaumer was the first to set foot upon the rock of Bosseven, and he felt strongly tempted to plant a tri-coloured flag upon it, according to custom when one takes possession of a newly discovered island. Doutrelaise followed him, and the men began to prepare the apparatus used in sub-marine explorations. "This will be a capital place to work," said Jacques. "This rock will hold many more people than the mansion of the illustrious Matapan. There is plenty of room for my men and my apparatus, and when we have obtained possession of the chests of gold, we will give a ball here to the ladies of Porsal, Porspoder, Lampaul, and even Ploudalmezeau, which is the largest place in the canton. It would be a *fête* that these people would talk about for fifty years."

"The bear's hide again!" murmured Doutrelaise.

"We will kill our bear, or rather, we will fish him up. Look! do you notice that spot in the water? It is of a bright green colour, without any of those patches of red or brown which indicate the presence of invisible rocks. Ah, well, it is there that the wreck lies below twenty or thirty fathoms of water. I can picture the shipwreck now as plainly as if I had been on board. The American vessel took a north-easterly course, with the intention of entering Saint George's channel. She was bound for Liverpool. A western gale drove her from her course, towards the English Channel. However she either had no pilot, or he failed to discern not merely the Ouessant light but the others along the coast, as frequently occurs on foggy nights—and she ran straight upon the Porsal rocks—there are a host of them, enough to shatter all the fleets in the universe. If this vessel had not struck upon Bosseven, it would have struck upon one of the others, or upon the coast, which is only a short distance off."

"In that case," said Doutrelaise, "I am surprised that the sailor who revealed the secret to Monsieur de la Calprenède was picked up at sea. It seems to me it would have been an easy matter for him to have reached the shore, if he knew how to swim."

"You talk like the Parisian that you are. The poor wretch had no choice. He managed to seize a floating chicken-coop, to which he clung desperately, going wherever the current took him. Ah! had a wave cast him upon Bosseven just as the vessel went to pieces, it is probable that everybody would have heard the story of the lost millions. So everything was for the best, even the death of the poor devil, who would probably have eventually divulged his secret."

"Your reasoning is admirable, certainly; but I can't understand why

the treasure, if it really exists, has never been discovered ; and on seeing that light last evening—”

“ You fancied that some gold-hunter was ahead of us. Ah, well, it will now be an easy matter to convince you that Ploarec was not mistaken when he gave us his explanation of the phenomenon. Do you see those large flat corks floating on the water ? Well, they indicate the position of the lobster-traps, and I am sure the fishermen capture a large number, for the wreck must furnish these voracious creatures with ample food. They eat anything, but prefer corpses, my dear fellow.”

“ Thanks, for the information. I shall not forget it the next time I am offered some lobster salad. But where did this rubbish come from ? ” suddenly inquired Doutrelaise, stooping to pick up a broken bottle that was lying in a crevice of the rock.

“ That contained rum,” said Courtaumer, after smelling the bottle. “ These fishermen are not averse to that beverage by any means. Some Porsal man has drained it and then flung it aside.”

“ Didn’t you notice the label ? ”

“ No ; let me see. Why, it came from Cuvillier’s, the fashionable establishment in the Rue de la Paix. These people certainly don’t purchase their supplies there. This bottle puzzles me.”

“ And alarms me,” said Doutrelaise.

“ Another of your chimerical fears ! ” exclaimed Courtaumer. “ Your imagination is too vivid, my dear fellow.”

“ Still, this bottle did not get here unhelped, and as it was purchased in Paris—”

“ It was a Parisian who brought it here.”

“ To Bosseven ? That seems hardly probable,” replied Albert.

“ I admit that Bosseven isn’t a fashionable seaside resort, but during the summer the neighbouring coast is often visited by tourists. There isn’t a village between Paimpol and Lorient that does not make pretensions to being a watering-place. Every spot has its admirers, and I am well acquainted with one fashionable family who leave their elegant mansion in the Avenue d’Eylau every year to spend the months of July, August and September at Douarnenez, where everything smells of sardines, even to the water one drinks.”

“ You always have an answer ready, but I have my doubts.”

“ Well, there is nothing to prevent you from investigating the matter. The boat is going to take you to Porsal. Talk with the people there, and ascertain if there are any strangers in the neighbourhood. If there are any, the fact would not be likely to pass unnoticed.”

“ Especially if they have come recently, for in the month of January tourists must be rare in this out-of-the-way place.”

“ Oh, you will soon obtain the necessary information—and you have the whole day before you. This evening, on your return, you shall tell me what you have learned, and I shall perhaps have some good news for you. Come, the boatmen are waiting. Wind and tide are both in your favour, and you will reach the shore in twenty minutes.”

As Courtaumer had prophesied, the trip proved a short one. The sea was calm, and the tiny craft seemed to fly over the surface of the water. The oarsmen guided it towards the harbour of Porsal, leaving Green Island to the larboard. A quarter of an hour after its departure, the frail skiff rounded a rocky promontory and entered a large bay divided in the centre by a long neck of land which formed two basins of equal size.

The somewhat gloomy scenery harmonised with Albert's mood, and it was with no little pleasure that he set foot on the miry beach skirting the cottages occupied by the inhabitants of the little seaside hamlet which he now beheld for the first time. A dozen boats were lying on the beach waiting for the tide to set them afloat; women were knitting on their doorsteps with their children playing around them, and some seamen with their pipes in their mouth, were leisurely mending their nets. They did not appear at all surprised to see a fashionable Parisian gentleman. The arrival of the yacht had evidently already been reported, and they knew that it contained strangers. It is more difficult to preserve one's *incognito* on the seashore than in any town, large or small.

Doutrelaise told his two oarsmen to help themselves from the abundant supply of liquors with which the boat was provided, reserving for himself merely a partridge pie and a bottle of old Burgundy, which he intended to deal with after he had gained an appetite by a long walk. This arrangement suited the men perfectly, and they would have felt greatly disappointed, had he requested them to accompany him. He preferred, however, to apply for the information he wanted to an old sailor, who was lounging on a sort of wharf built of large stones piled up haphazard. The man had an honest genial face, and lifted his tarpaulin respectfully on the approach of Doutrelaise, whose first inquiry was if there was an inn in the village.

"They sell liquor in nearly all the houses," was the fisherman's reply, "but you will only find brandy and cider there, and you are probably not very fond of either beverage."

"Not particularly," replied Doutrelaise, smiling. "I have some wine in my boat, and you must allow me to offer you a bottle. I merely wished to ascertain if tourists could find accommodation here."

"There are plenty of curtained beds to be had for the asking, but they wouldn't suit everybody. The English lord who comes here every year to fish pretends he would as soon sleep in a cupboard."

"He comes during the summer, I suppose?"

"Oh! summer and winter are the same to him. He scorns bad weather. He goes outside when none of us would dare to pass Cape Trémazan. Last week, it was blowing so badly that the waves in the channel seemed mountain-high, but for all that, he went out in his boat and didn't return until the morning. He's here now, and this time he has brought with him one of his friends, a fellow who is as crazy about boating and fishing as he is, and they have hired that big house you see over there."

"Is his friend also an Englishman?"

"He doesn't look like one. I am inclined to think he's a Spaniard. But he must have had as much sea-faring experience as the other, for he handles an oar and manages a boat like a thorough sailor. However, they are both from Paris."

"The bottle of rum purchased at Cuvillier's is explained," thought Doutrelaise.

"Do you know whether these gentlemen sometimes fish on a rock called Bosseven?" he inquired.

"Oh! yes, round about Bosseven, Men-Gouziane, Leach-Braz, and every other rock where there is any chance of catching a fish. But they always go out at night; they sleep all day."

"Now I know what to think about the light we saw last evening," muttered Doutrelaise.

"If you care to make their acquaintance, you must come ashore about

dusk when they generally come down to smoke a pipe with us, and stand treat when they are good-natured—which does not often happen. But begging your pardon, sir, are you the engineer who has been sent from Brest to make the soundings in the Relec Channel?"

"No; I have merely accompanied him for my own amusement, and came on shore for a walk. What is there to see here?"

"Not much, when one has seen the village—that is barring the ruined castle which strangers think quite a curiosity. The square tower is nearly as high as the mainmast of a frigate."

"Well, I will pay it a visit. The house in which these gentlemen live is near the castle, isn't it?"

"Yes; it's the one with green shutters. It was built by a shipbuilder from Morlaix some years ago, and though it looks very well, it isn't in much better repair than the castle."

"Thanks, my friend, we shall soon meet again, and I hope you will do me the favour to take a drink with me."

"I shall feel no inclination to refuse," was the seaman's laughing response.

He did not offer to act as a guide, and Doutrelaise preferred to visit the castle alone. The visitors whom this native of Porsal had spoken about had aroused his curiosity, and he was anxious to meet them and see with whom he and Courtaumer would have to deal during their sojourn on the coast, for the strangers would, no doubt, sooner or later, show themselves near the yacht. He proceeded leisurely towards the ruins, which stood upon an eminence commanding a view of the harbour, and suddenly, on looking up, he perceived a man emerging from the house with the green shutters. As well as Doutrelaise could judge, from a distance, this stranger was dressed like a fisherman, and he carried a bag, which perhaps contained some tackle, slung over his shoulder. Still it seemed rather heavy to have such insignificant contents. The man ascended the hill without turning to look behind him, and when he had reached the ruins, he disappeared under the arched gateway of the outer enclosure. Doutrelaise had taken the footpath leading up the side of the hill, the ascent of which was neither long nor difficult. The young fellow paused for a moment in front of the house with the green shutters, and perceived that the sailor who had just been talking with him was quite right in saying that it was almost as dilapidated as the castle. "It is anything but a comfortable abode," thought Albert, "and this Englishman must be crazy to establish himself in such a dwelling in the winter. They say that some of his countrymen rent places in Norway, and even in Lapland, in order to fish for salmon, but they only engage in this sport in summer. I am curious to see this eccentric man who takes up his abode in Porsal in the month of January, and I shall surely meet him sooner or later, as Bosseven seems to be a sort of headquarters for lobsters and the like."

Engaged in reflections of this nature, Doutrelaise continued his ascent, and soon reached the old castle, which was indeed a well-preserved fragment of the military architecture of medieval times. The young fellow crossed a courtyard, at the end of which rose a square tower some ninety feet in height, and on entering it he perceived a stone staircase built in the wall, and probably leading to the battlements above. He began to climb it without really knowing why, for he had little taste for archaeology, still he persevered until he reached the summit. An extensive view of the surrounding country rewarded him for his exertions. On one side lay the land with

its trees, farm-houses and church spires ; on the other hand, stretched the sea with its countless islands, white-sailed vessels, and foam-crested waves. Doutrelaise had no difficulty in recognising Bosseven, and could even distinguish the workmen in the employ of Jacques de Courtaumer.

"Ah," thought Albert, "even if Jacques succeeded, even if the sea did yield up its buried treasures to Monsieur de la Calprenède, in what way should I be benefited ? If the count were worth his millions, would he give me the daughter he refused to give me when he was poor ? No, for I sha'n't even have the credit of having assisted Jacques in the recovery of this gold. Jacques doesn't require my help, I cannot be of the slightest service to him, and I often ask myself why he has brought me here." The wind, which was whistling a melancholy dirge around the ruins, whispered an evil thought in Albert's ear. "Who knows but that it is for himself he is working ?" it murmured.

But he quickly drove away the suspicion, which was alike unworthy of him and of the friendship which existed between himself and Jacques de Courtaumer, and he wondered what could have become of the man whom he had seen leaving the house with the green shutters and entering the castle, the man whom his personal anxieties and fears had caused him to forget. His sudden disappearance was strange, but Doutrelaise, who attached no great importance to it, said to himself that he had probably gone in one direction and the stranger in another, and he decided to descend from his perch and return to the boat, where various toothsome dainties were awaiting him. Just as he had reached the foot of the staircase, however, he was not a little surprised to see the stranger suddenly appear with an empty bag in his hand, the same bag which he had carried with difficulty in climbing the hill. The stranger seemed even more astonished than Doutrelaise on finding himself face to face with a person in the garb of a fashionable tourist. He stepped back hastily against the wall, and had it not been for this obstacle he would probably have gone off, for the meeting seemed to be anything but pleasing to him ; but there was only one door, and Albert barred the way. "Good morning, my friend," said Doutrelaise. "I saw you enter the castle a few moments ago, but afterwards lost sight of you. Where the deuce were you ?"

"At the back of the tower, probably," was the rather reluctant response.

"Ah ! that explains it. Come out into the open air, where we can talk more comfortably," added Doutrelaise, stepping into the courtyard.

The man, who seemed anxious to leave the place, needed no urging. In manner and appearance, he strongly resembled a sailor, and yet Doutrelaise experienced a singular impression on glancing at him. His sly look awakened some vague recollection in the young fellow's mind, and he almost fancied that he had seen him somewhere before.

"You just left the Englishman's house, didn't you ?" inquired Albert. "Are you in his service ?"

The man hesitated for a moment, but finally replied, with a faint smile : "I am the Englishman."

"What ! it is you who have come here to fish ?" exclaimed Doutrelaise, in amazement.

"Yes ; a fondness for fishing is no crime, I believe."

"No, certainly not, and I beg you to excuse me for mistaking you for a different person. You look so little like an Englishman, that I—"

"You can't always judge from appearances ; I was born in England,

but I was brought up in India, and have spent more time on the continent than in my own country."

" You have been in Paris recently, I hear."

" Yes ; and strange as it may appear, it seems to me I met you there."

" That is quite possible, for it seems to me I have seen your face before."

" Did you come to Porsal to fish ?" asked the stranger.

" Not exactly ; I merely accompanied one of my friends who has business in the neighbourhood."

" Then you belong to the yacht that anchored off Green Island yesterday ?"

" Yes ; and this morning I decided to visit the ruins, the only object of interest in the neighbourhood."

" Might I venture to ask the name of the officer in command of your vessel ?"

" Certainly. It is Monsieur de Courtaumer."

" Cortaumer ! the gentleman who was formerly a lieutenant in the navy ?"

" The same," replied Doutrelaise, " Jacques de Courtamer. Do you know him ?"

" Oh, no," stammered the stranger, who had suddenly changed countenance. " I don't know him, but I have heard him spoken of."

" If you wish to make his acquaintance it will be a very easy matter. You often leave the harbour to fish, and there is nothing to prevent you from coming on board the yacht. We shall be delighted to see you."

" Thank you, but I am not very fond of society ; in fact, I only care for fishing and—"

" And your friend probably shares your tastes, for you have a friend with you, so the people of Porsal informed me."

" So they told you that, did they ? Ah, well ! they know nothing about it. There are two of us, it is true, because it takes two persons to manage a fishing-boat, but the idiots don't know whether my companion is a friend or a servant."

" I assure you that it makes no difference whatever to me," Doutrelaise answered, " and you are not at all obliged to cultivate our acquaintance, but the chances are that we shall meet occasionally, for I am told that you go to Bosseven every night to set your lobster-traps there."

" Bosseven !" repeated the man, recoiling a step or two, " do you know where Bosseven is ?"

" Perfectly well. It is in the immediate vicinity of that island that Monsieur de Courtaumer is going to make some soundings."

" Soundings, and for what purpose pray ?"

" He will tell you himself if you will take the trouble to ask him."

" Ah, I understand ; he has been entrusted with a mission by the hydrographic service."

" He has a mission, it is true, and I assure you that he will fulfil it. He is a man who always does his duty thoroughly. But does the fact that he will be working at Bosseven annoy you ?"

" Well, it will interfere with me a little—because that is the best place for fishing in the neighbourhood, and your friend's soundings will frighten the fish away. But I will try and find some sport elsewhere for a while."

" But why ? You only fish at night, I think—that is, you set your traps then, don't you ?"

" Yes, it is the best time. We take them away very early in the morning."

"Well, the work which my friend has to conduct will be done during the day. One must be an enthusiast to wander about at night as you do."

"Oh, I only go to Bosseven, and I shall discontinue my visits there, for, you see, lobsters are very shy—the least noise frightens them, and they will now probably desert Bosseven."

"That would be a pity. I relied on a feast."

"Your men will find some elsewhere. Have you many men on board?"

"About twenty."

The Englishman's face lengthened perceptibly, but after a short pause, he remarked carelessly : "The rascals will take everything they can lay their hands upon, probably. I shall give up my traps for the present, and go outside to fish until your work is accomplished. Will it require long?"

"I don't know ; perhaps one month, perhaps two. Courtaumer can tell you much better than I can."

"It is hardly likely that I shall remain here so long. I shall return to England, I think, and remain there until the spring."

"I am sorry we have interfered with your plans. But you won't leave to-morrow, I suppose ?"

"Certainly not to-morrow, nor even this week. I must write to London for my yacht. I dislike travelling by land."

"Ah, so you have a yacht ! I congratulate you. I am sure it is more luxuriously appointed than ours ; still, if you felt inclined to pay us a visit one of these days, we should be very glad to offer you proper hospitality. But I am detaining you here, and you are probably anxious to return home, unless you have a taste for archaeology, in which case these ruins could not fail to interest you. Can you tell me the date of the castle's construction?"

"I know nothing at all about such matters."

"Excuse me, but seeing you enter here with a bag on your shoulder, I fancied you had come to draw a plan or take a photograph of it."

"A bag," stammered the man. "Ah, yes ; I keep my fishing-tackle in it."

"And you store your tackle here ; I understand. Ah, well, sir, allow me to bid you good-morning." Doutrelaise bowed as he spoke, and then passed out through the gate by which he had entered the castle. The Englishman showed no inclination to prolong the conversation, but followed Albert at a distance, walking with measured tread.

"A singular interview, and a most extraordinary person," Doutrelaise said to himself, as he descended the hill. "Jacques will be greatly astonished when I repeat my conversation with this eccentric man. The English are strange creatures. But is he really an Englishman ? I ought to have satisfied myself on that point by addressing him in his own language. I am not a very clever English scholar, but I am sufficiently acquainted with the tongue to know whether he pronounces it correctly or not. Bah ! what do I care about his nationality, after all ? But I am not sorry he is going away ; he might cause us some annoyance. Somehow or other, I cannot rid myself of the impression that I have met him somewhere before."

On reaching the foot of the hill, Doutrelaise turned and saw the man entering the house with the green shutters. The village was not far off, and Albert reached it a few minutes later. The old fisherman whom he had spoken to was still there, and asked him how he had enjoyed his walk. "I have not wasted my time," replied Doutrelaise, with a laugh. "I had quite a conversation with the Englishman."

"Yes, I saw you together. You met him at the castle, didn't you? He goes there every day."

"Yes, but I did not see his friend."

"The Spaniard? He never goes out before the evening. You will be sure to meet him if you remain with me until to-morrow morning."

But Doutrelaise was not at all inclined to do that. The only thing he now really desired was his breakfast, for he was very hungry, and he invited his new acquaintance to accompany him to the boat, where that delectable partridge pie was awaiting him. But the fisherman would only accept a glass of wine and a bottle of brandy to take home with him. In exchange for this precious gift, he gave Doutrelaise a bit of excellent advice, which was to set out on his return as soon as possible. The wind was rising, and as it came from the south-west, it would be better not to wait for the gale that seemed imminent. Accordingly, Doutrelaise gave orders to return. It was fortunate that he did so, for the little boat had scarcely rounded the cape protecting the harbour from the gales before the violence of the current and a heavy sea compelled the crew to keep close to the shore and enter the Relec Channel.

This was not the way to return to Bosseven; but they had no choice. Even then, it took them three hours to reach the yacht. The two boatmen were nearly exhausted, and more than once Doutrelaise feared they would be carried out into the channel. Courtaumer had just returned, and although he had experienced much less difficulty, he greeted his friends with these words: "You acted wisely in hastening your return. Had you waited a half-hour longer, you would not have been able to reach the yacht. I have great news to tell you."

"Important as your news may be, you must allow me to dry myself before listening to it," replied Doutrelaise. "I am as wet as if I had fallen into the sea."

Doutrelaise, who was shivering, then hastened to his cabin, and put on some dry clothes after rubbing himself vigorously. Twenty minutes later, the circulation of the blood being thoroughly re-established, he entered the saloon, which contained a number of luxurious divans, a book-case filled with well-chosen volumes, and an excellent piano. Courtaumer was awaiting him there. "You feel more comfortable now, don't you?" inquired Jacques. "I have prepared a glass of toddy to warm the inner man. Drink it, light a pipe or a cigar, and give me your undivided attention. I have important news, I tell you."

"I can guess what you have to say," replied Doutrelaise, after he had swallowed the strong compound which his friend had just concocted. "Your divers have found nothing."

"You are entirely mistaken. The information given by the American sailor has proved to be correct in every particular. The vessel struck on a ledge of rock which is not visible even at low tide, but which is as jagged as the teeth of a saw. The prow of the shipwrecked clipper came in collision with this formidable obstacle, and was shattered into a thousand fragments. The bed of the ocean is hard and rocky at this point, so that the hull has not been buried in sand, but lies on one side, and there is an opening in it through which ten men could easily pass shoulder to shoulder."

"That is indeed a fortunate discovery. But how about the chests full of gold?"

"They are there."

"Really?" exclaimed Doutrelaise. "I confess that I did not believe it."

"You can believe it now. My men have seen and counted them. There are a dozen of them, and I have satisfied myself as to the genuine character of the contents."

"Then your news is indeed good news."

"Yes, but—there is a 'but,' you see—the gold has been tampered with. Eleven of the twelve chests are intact: the twelfth has been opened. Its lid has been shattered with a pick-axe, and the fastenings have been wrench'd off."

"And the contents removed?"

"Not entirely, but in a great measure."

"That's strange."

"It proves that some one is ahead of us, though not by much, as he has not even had time to empty one of the chests."

"Who can have done it?"

"I have no idea; it can't be any of the people in the neighbourhood. To descend to such a depth, one requires apparatus which the fishermen don't possess. A party of men in a boat anchored over the wreck could never have succeeded in breaking open an iron chest and raising one of the heavy bars of gold to the surface. The one my men recovered to-day weighs nearly thirty pounds, and there are some even heavier. Besides, in the hold my divers found some implements such as are only used by men of their own profession."

"In that case, the people who began this work must have used a diving-bell."

"Impossible! for every one for ten leagues around would have heard of it. An undertaking of that kind doesn't pass unobserved. A large vessel, several smaller ones, and the help of fifteen or twenty men, are necessary."

"Then how do you explain the mystery?"

"I think that the work has been done by three or four persons, perhaps by only two or three bold companions, who have heard of the shipwreck, and who have come here secretly to obtain possession of the gold."

"Would this be possible under the circumstances?"

"The fact that the rascals have already secured several hundred thousand francs is sufficient proof of the practicability of their scheme. It is even possible that two persons might have accomplished it."

"Two!" repeated Doutrelaise, thoughtfully.

"Yes, and certainly there can't be many of them, as they have not yet extracted a paltry million. Equipped as we are, we shall extract nearly a million a day. I am sure of this, now that I know how easy it is to obtain access to the wreck."

"It may be that Monsieur de la Calprenède's rivals have been at work only a short time. However, what do you intend to do?"

"To proceed as if nothing of the kind had occurred, of course. These rascals will have plenty of business on their hands if they attempt to dispute possession of the wreck with us, and they won't think of doing so. But I intend to catch them, and have formed my plans accordingly. It isn't probable that they will attempt the work in the daytime, and to prevent them from doing so at night, four of our men will mount guard there every evening. I should have carried my plans into execution this very night if the weather had been more propitious, but the scoundrels won't venture out in a sea like this."

" You think the tempest is going to last, then ? "

" In the first place it isn't a tempest, but merely a squall, and I feel comparatively sure that we shall have pleasant weather to-morrow. The barometer is rising; we shall be able to begin work, and on and after to-morrow evening Bosseven will be watched night and day."

" What would you say if I told you that I had perhaps discovered the leader of this expedition directed against the millions you are trying to recover ? "

" Bah ! who is it ? "

" A very vulgar and unprepossessing Englishman, who has been living for about a month in a house near the ruins of the castle."

" An Englishman ! That isn't very surprising. As I remarked last evening, one meets English people everywhere."

" Yes, but this man is, to say the least, very peculiar in his tastes. He goes out every night to fish for lobsters with a companion whom I have not seen, but who does not look in the least like an Englishman, that is, so I am told. The fisherman who gave me this information also asserted that they were the persons who set their traps off Bosseven last evening."

" Then it must have been their lantern we saw. This discovery is indeed worthy of attention. It seems as if the deceased sailor had taken them into his confidence as well as Monsieur de la Calprenède."

" The strangest thing about it is, that the man's face doesn't seem altogether unfamiliar to me."

" Indeed, well, I will go to Porsal to-morrow and have a look at these gentlemen—that is if I have the time, for to-morrow I am going to engage in the work myself. You will have an opportunity to see me descend to the bottom of the Atlantic in a diver's costume. I wish to examine the wreck and see the gold for myself. But let us have dinner now and then go to bed, so as to be ready to rise with the sun."

Doutrelaise assented. The dinner proved excellent. The wind soon abated, and the sea speedily became calm again. The sailor at the lookout had nothing whatever to report, and no lights appeared near Bosseven. The Englishman had doubtless gone elsewhere to fish.

XV

JACQUES DE COURTAUMER had prophesied fine weather, and the next morning the weather was superb, indeed. The wind had changed during the night, the sea had become calm again, and the sky was cloudless. Even Bosseven, gloomy old Bosseven, had assumed a joyous aspect; snow-white sea-gulls skimmed merrily over the blue waves, and the sailors from the yacht, scattered over the rock, seemed bent on a pleasure party. They had just finished a bountiful breakfast, and everybody was preparing for the exploration which their captain was now to lead in person. Jacques was already arrayed in his diving suit, with the exception of his helmet, and Doutrelaise was gaily assisting in the final preparations for the submarine expedition. " If your aunt saw you in these accoutrements, she would think you had gone mad," he remarked to Jacques.

" She thinks so already," replied Courtaumer. " I feel very comfortable, however: these leaden-soled shoes are rather heavy, it is true, but the india-rubber garments are very pliable, and when I put on my helmet, I shall look like a knight of the middle ages starting on a crusade. I am sure

I should achieve a great success at the Bal de l'Opera ; and if I promenaded through Matapan's baronial halls in this garb, the aimable Marchefroid would die of terror, a consummation most devoutly to be wished for. However, I should not advise you to array yourself in such a manner to ask for the hand of Mademoiselle de la Calprenède."

"Alas ! her father would refuse it even if I presented myself in a black dress coat and a white cravat."

"You shall put on a plain frock coat, and he will give it to you."

"Have you telegraphed him the good news ?"

"No. In the first place there is no telegraph office at Porsal. I should have had to send the message to Conquet, and I need all my men to-day ; besides, I did not care to announce my discovery until after I had achieved a complete success. Monsieur de la Calprenède wrote to me every day while we were at Brest, and I tried to persuade him to be patient. I hope he will be so, although I shouldn't be so much surprised if he made his appearance here some day unannounced."

"Alone ?" inquired Doutrelaise eagerly.

"Well, no. It is hardly likely that he would consent to leave his daughter with no protector but her maid, in a house where he only has enemies. She has a brother, it is true, but one can't place much reliance upon him."

"But on the other hand, how can the count bring Mademoiselle Arlette to a fishing hamlet, where one can't even obtain a decent lodging ?"

"You forget that we have luxurious apartments on board our yacht."

"And you forget that Monsieur de la Calprenède will be very disagreeably surprised when he sees me, for he is still ignorant of the fact that I accompanied you."

"But Mademoiselle de la Calprenède knows it."

"All the same if they do come, I shall be obliged to leave at once."

"Bah ! we will arrange matters, never fear. To tell the truth, I shouldn't be at all sorry to have the stern parent find you here. The close proximity of the millions might help in hastening the finish of your romance. But I am talking nonsense here, while my brave diver is waiting for me to descend. I am not yet quite equal to going alone. Besides, in case of any accident, it is better that there should be two of us."

"Explain how you proceed, for I haven't the slightest idea."

"Nothing could be more simple. This costume is, as you see, completely impervious to water, and I am as safe inside it as a turtle within his shell. The rubber-tube attached to the helmet, is the thread that binds me to life, for it is through this tube that my men send me the air I need to exist in Neptune's realm. This rope fastened to my belt enables our men to draw me to the surface when I give the signal for them to do so by pulling this other rope, which is secured to a bell fastened to our boat. I shall take no implements with me, as I don't intend to work, but when my divers begin their task, they will have hatchets, pincers, spades, saws, in fact, all the tools necessary for opening the chests, fastened to their persons as well as two bags in which to place the gold. However, I am going down merely for a promenade, a sort of tour of inspection. Any child could do what I am going to do."

"One would think to hear you that there was no danger."

"There are two dangers. The glass mask in front of the helmet may break ; or the rubber air-tube may be cut, or, what is of more frequent occurrence, become entangled around some object in such a way as to

prevent the air from above from reaching the diver. In either case, death would perhaps be the result. However, a man generally has time enough to ring and if he is drawn to the surface promptly, before asphyxia becomes complete, he is almost sure to recover. There are some inconveniences, however, to which it takes time to grow accustomed. For instance, the rushing sound in one's head and ears. It is also necessary to keep an upright position, which is no easy matter, as it is very difficult to maintain one's equilibrium in deep water. One must, moreover, accustom oneself to distinguishing objects in the faint and uncertain light that traverses the many feet of water that separate one from the sun's rays."

"What you say is very interesting, but what necessity is there for you to descend to these watery depths, in which your life will be endangered?"

"My dear fellow, a captain who remains in camp while his men are under fire never has good soldiers; besides, I cannot rely implicitly upon the report of a subordinate. I must see for myself. So don't attempt to dissuade me from going down, for if I should back out now my diver would certainly make fun of me. You must see that the men at the pump send me my supply of air regularly. You won't have time to grow anxious, for I shall not be absent long. Ploarec, bring me my helmet."

The head diver had already donned his submarine costume, Courtaumer's helmet was fastened on, and after shaking hands with Doutrelaise, he entered the boat, placed his foot on the ladder fastened to its side, and descended slowly into the sea. The man who was to act as his guide had preceded him. As Doutrelaise saw his friend disappear and the water close over him his heart sank. Jacques de Courtaumer was a brave fellow, and he had spoken in no boastful spirit when he said that this submarine excursion had no terrors for him. Nevertheless, he experienced considerable emotion during the swift and perpendicular descent which would end only when he had reached the bottom of the sea. Dragged down by his leaden-soled shoes and the leaden cuirass that protected his chest, he sank rapidly, and the deeper he descended the more intense became that indescribable sensation which only professional divers know. There was at first a feeling of discomfort, then of oppression, and finally of suffocation. His blood rushed to his head, his arteries throbbed heavily and rapidly; there was a strange buzzing sound in his ears, and his sight became dim. He felt as if a band of iron encircled his temples.

Gradually, however, the diver becomes accustomed to the scanty supply of air sent him from above by the men who hold his life in their hands. Gradually, too, his eyes grow accustomed to gazing through the glass front of the helmet, and he finally regains the freedom of movement of which the pressure of the water at first deprived him. Jacques had indeed become himself again before he reached the bottom, and he advanced without difficulty towards the professional diver who had preceded him, and who now offered him a hand to sustain and guide him. There was no one to contemplate them save the fishes, who, alarmed by their unexpected presence, fled precipitately. Courtaumer had accepted the hand which his more experienced companion offered to him, and the pair advanced together towards the wreck, that rose up before them like a submarine mountain. The ship was lying on its side, and a large hole in the hull enabled anyone to enter it without the slightest difficulty. The head diver, who had carefully examined the wreck on the day before, knew where to find the chests of gold,

and guided his companion very cleverly through the dangerous labyrinth which it was necessary to traverse. They proceeded with the greatest possible caution, stooping to avoid any blows which might have broken the glass in the front of their helmets, and keeping one hand on the air tube to prevent it from becoming entangled around anything, and the other on the rope to be ready to give the signal for re-ascending to the men above.

All went well at first. Courtaumer held himself proudly erect. He was not afraid. But an ordeal upon which he had not relied was in store for him, an ordeal calculated to chill the bravest heart.

The chests were there, standing in the same order as when they were first placed on board the ship. They were so strong and heavy that the water had neither broken nor displaced them. Courtaumer saw them so distinctly that he could count them, but in the bluish light that descended through twenty fathoms of water, he also distinguished shapeless forms, which were moving slowly to and fro, swayed by the almost imperceptible undulation of the water. These shadowy forms sometimes floated past the glass front of his helmet, sometimes they touched him, and sometimes tattered fragments of clothing coiled round his arms. He understood and staggered, and if his guide had not supported him, he would have fallen, for his courage suddenly failed him.

The treasure was guarded by corpses. The vessel had sunk so suddenly that such sailors as were not on deck at the moment the catastrophe occurred, had been drowned in the hold below. Death had overtaken them there, and there they had remained. Buffeted for two long years by the waves, they were no longer anything but shapeless objects, and Jacques shuddered with horror on coming in contact with their remains. His companion, more accustomed to such sights, led him to the last chest—the one which had been opened. It stood in a corner, and Courtaumer could scarcely distinguish it, so dim was the light. A dense fog seemed to envelop each object, and the sense of touch proved a more useful agent than that of vision. Courtaumer followed the example of his companion, who had knelt down before this chest, the lid of which had been removed. He plunged his hands into it, and at the very bottom he had the satisfaction of finding several bars of gold, which the unknown divers who had preceded him had not yet carried away. He even allowed himself the pleasure of taking one out, so that he might show it to Doutrelaise. This booty satisfied him for the time being, and he was rising again when his other hand came in contact with a long, circular object, something like a column. He thought at first that it was one of the iron pillars that support the deck of a vessel; but, on grasping it, he discovered that the substance was elastic. Astonished by this singular discovery, he turned and found himself face to face with an object which was oscillating slowly to and fro, like a half-filled bottle immersed in an upright position. The object resembled a man in shape, and Jacques fancied he could see a kind of metallic light gleaming through the comparative darkness. He approached still nearer, and his forehead came in contact with a glass plate, while his arms clasped a flaccid and gummy substance.

Then the truth stood revealed. The phantom which had arisen before him was a diver, equipped in a helmet and cuirass like his own. Courtaumer summoned courage enough to look through the glass of the phantom helmet and he thought he could see a livid face, the face of a drowned man behind it. He who had trespassed on the Count de la Calprenède's domain was dead, and his death had doubtless been the result of an accident. Probably

the air-tube had broken. Still, how did it happen that the unfortunate diver's comrades had not drawn his body out of the water? A strange suspicion darted through Jacques' mind. He caught hold of the tube which was floating above the man's head. It was very long, and it took him some time to draw it in. When he at last secured the end of it, he saw that it had been severed by a single blow! The end was perfectly smooth, and the tube could only have been cut by a very sharp instrument, wielded by an adroit and powerful hand. Further doubt was impossible. The diver had been murdered by the companion who had remained in the boat to send him the air he needed. Moreover, the tube had not only been cut, but knotted.

Courtaumer's presence of mind did not desert him. He returned to his guide, who was filling the bag suspended from his belt with gold, and led him to this lifeless body. They could not exchange their opinions, but they understood each other, and with one accord gave the signal to be drawn to the surface. A moment later they emerged from the water like two marine monsters, close to the boat, and Doutrelaise, who was anxiously awaiting their re-appearance, gave a cry of joy on seeing his friend again.

Courtaumer was the first to ascend the ladder and place himself in the hands of the two men in charge of the air-pump, so that they might divest him of his rather clumsy habiliments. "Whew!" he exclaimed, when his helmet had been removed. "I am not sorry to see sunlight again. There is no doubt the blue sky is wonderfully lovely. Give me a glass of brandy, one of you. I need something to warm me. It is very damp down there."

"You are back again, thank God!" exclaimed Doutrelaise. "I hope you won't repeat your experiment. What did you see down there?"

"Many frightful things, my friend."

"Oh, I understand. The chests are empty."

"By no means; on the contrary, they are all full, with one exception, and Monsieur de la Calprenède is to-day the possessor of eleven millions. Some of his money has been stolen from him, it is true, but no one will steal what remains, for I have just seen the lifeless body of one of the thieves, and as it is more than probable that there were but two, the other will be obliged to relinquish his undertaking."

"The lifeless body of one of the thieves, did you say?"

"Yes, his among many others. The ship is a floating cemetery; those who were drowned in it are still there. But the thief wore the costume of a diver, and everything indicates that it was his comrade who cut the air-tube. We can't leave him there. I am resolved to see his face."

"This is certainly an extraordinary adventure."

"No more extraordinary than the accident which insured Monsieur de la Calprenède an immense fortune. But I must ascertain who the thief is."

"But how can you hope to do that? His face will not reveal his name. It is more than probable that you have never seen him before."

"That is quite likely; still, he did not fall from the sky into the sea. He probably resides in Porsal or some other village on the coast. The men hereabouts will recognise him."

"What if it were the Englishman who is so fond of fishing for lobsters?"

"Not a bad idea. I have no more faith in his passion for crustacea than you have—the lobsters were only an excuse. But now I think of it, you saw him only yesterday, and in that case the crime must have been perpetrated last night; and, upon my word, that is quite possible."

"It is even certain, for on examining the wreck yesterday, the diver didn't find this body."

"No, or he would have mentioned the fact. He is removing his accoutrements now, and as soon as he has finished I will question him."

"The more I reflect upon it, the more firmly I am convinced that I'm not mistaken. I recollect now, that while I was talking with the Englishman at the castle, I told him that you would not work at night, so he knew that he would meet no one on the rock. I remember, too, that he also declared that his sojourn at Porsal was drawing to an end, and that he meant to return to England when his yacht arrived."

"He probably told you that to mislead you. I'll bet a handsome amount that he has already decamped. It will be easy to satisfy ourselves on that point, however. Porsal isn't far off."

"Then it must be his associate who was drowned, or rather murdered."

"Unless the friend drowned the Englishman. This much is certain ; one of the two men murdered his companion and probably so as not to have to share the spoil. These men came here to obtain possession of several millions that did not belong to them. We disturbed them just as they were beginning operations. Your conversation with one of them enlightened them as to our plans, and they realised that they would not be able to contend against us. They had barely had time enough to secure a few hundred thousand francs ; and to scoundrels who had hoped to appropriate millions, this was a very poor haul. So the greater scoundrel of the two said to himself : 'I will keep this money for myself.'"

"And to obtain possession of it, the wretch murdered his friend ! " cried Doutrelaise. "If it was the man I saw yesterday, I should not be surprised, for he had the face of a bandit. But I am surprised that the other one, who certainly can't have been much better, should have allowed himself to be caught in such a trap."

"I think I understand how it occurred. The Englishman suggested that they should take advantage of their last night to empty the chest they had already opened, and his companion consented. It was probably agreed that they should take turns in diving. One went down while the other remained on the rock to supply him with air. The Englishman must have gone down first, and filled his pockets. Then he came up and his companion descended and while he was filling his bag, the Englishman cut the air-tube some distance below the surface of the water, and instant death ensued. Then the Englishman returned to Porsal, packed up his stolen gold—"

"I should not be surprised if he kept it secreted in some subterranean vault in the old castle. When I met him he looked as if he had just emerged from the bowels of the earth."

"Wherever he may have stored it, you may rest assured that he has taken it away with him. He had probably already engaged a vehicle to take him to Brest, where he would arrive in time for the eleven o'clock train. To-morrow morning he will be in Paris."

"How unfortunate it is that there is no telegraph office at Porsal ! "

"Bah ! a telegram would do no good. To whom would you send it ? Besides, you don't know the man's name, nor could you describe him."

"Still, we ought to inform the authorities. Monsieur de la Calprenède will be very angry with you if you do not."

"For the sake of the three-quarters of a million that the rascal has stolen from him ? If I were in the count's place I should be quite resigned to my loss. Of course I shall have the body of the drowned man brought on shore, but I shall then leave the matter in the hands of the Justice of the Peace. However, let me first confer with my diver, whose helmet is off now."

The diver advanced in obedience to Courtaumer's gesture, and without waiting to be questioned, said : "Captain, the men have just found a rope which I am inclined to think is the one fastened around the waist of the unfortunate man we just saw. His companions must have been infernal scoundrels to leave him there after cutting the air-tube."

"We will draw him out, my good fellow. It isn't likely that we shall be able to resuscitate him, but we shall at least be able to discover what place he belongs to. Now, my hearties," cried Courtaumer to the sailors, "catch hold and pull lively!"

Four strong men seized the rope, the end of which they had discovered floating on the water, and pulled at it lustily.

Courtaumer and Doutrelaise watched the operation with intense interest, for they would soon know who this man was whose life had paid the penalty of his dishonesty.

"Captain," said an old sailor who was standing behind them, "old Guinic is just leaving Porsal harbour, and he seems to be steering north of Green Island. It is he who generally takes tourists about, when there are any at Porsal, and perhaps he is taking some visitors to the yacht."

"I am not expecting any," replied Courtaumer.

"It is very strange," murmured Doutrelaise.

"Not so strange as the manoeuvres of that sailing boat which is approaching us," remarked Jacques. "See what a zigzag course it is pursuing."

"There is but one man in it, if I'm not mistaken."

"And he is evidently no seaman, and if the wind freshens, he will certainly capsize his craft. It is some one whose boating experience has been confined to fresh water. So much the worse for him, if he falls into the sea."

"It would be a charity to send a couple of your sailors to lend him a helping hand," said Doutrelaise.

"We will see about that presently. Let us get the body up, first."

"Here it comes," replied the panting sailors in chorus.

A moment later, the two friends saw the dead man rising straight up out of the water like a marine god emerging from his watery kingdom. He was lifted on board the boat and laid upon his back. The glass front of his helmet reflected the sunlight, and Courtaumer, who was bending over him, could not see his face. "Captain," timidly remarked one of the sailors, who was watching the movements of the boat that Jacques had spoken of a moment or two before, "the Parisian is steering straight towards the rocks to the south of Green Island."

"Let him do so. If he has come to bathe he will be satisfied."

"Here is the thief, captain," now exclaimed the coxswain who had just removed the helmet from the head of the corpse. "It is no resident of this district, fortunately. I was sure Bretons didn't dive to defraud others."

"As God hears me, I believe it is that scoundrel Matapan!" cried Jacques.

"Matapan!" repeated Doutrelaise. "That is impossible."

"It is he, I am sure of it," replied Courtaumer. "Death hasn't altered him beyond recognition. Look at that satyr-like face, that black beard—"

"Yes, I recognize him now. How strange! I can't understand it."

"But I understand it perfectly. The baron must have discovered Monsieur de la Calprcnède's secret, and have promised himself that he would come off winner in the race for the millions. He secretly organized a little expedition to Porsal, and took advantage of his clandestine departure to injure you by inventing that story of a duel which he reported to the authori-

ties. It wasn't a badly contrived conspiracy, by any means ; but he was unfortunate in his choice of an associate."

"Who was, of course, the scoundrel I met yesterday."

"Tell me, Albert, were the Englishman's ears pierced ?"

"Yes, I forgot to mention it ; but I recollect now that they were."

"Then I know him. It was the rascal you saw seated beside me in the Champs-Elysées one day—the man who asked me about Matapan, and whom on another occasion I saw talking with Marchefroid, the door-keeper. I'm not surprised that you didn't recognise him. The day you saw him you did not have much time to study his features. His presence in the Champs-Elysées annoyed me, and I left the place as soon as you came up, and if, as I am almost certain, it was he whom you met yesterday, you may rest assured that he has returned to Paris. However let us leave him to the hanging he so richly deserves, and decide what we shall do with the baron's remains. You cannot suppose that I have any desire to preserve them as a relic. I think I will send the body to Porsal as it is, allowing the mayor and custom-house officers to take such measures as they may consider advisable."

"Captain," interrupted one of the sailors, pointing to the little boat which was still following an erratic course between the shore and Green Island, "that craft will be on the rocks in ten minutes or so. The man on board knows no more about managing her than I do about growing cabbages."

"Let us spare him the annoyance of swallowing a dose of salt water," replied Jacques. "Take the ship's boat and go to his help."

"I will accompany them," said Doutrelaise.

"Very well. I shall return to the yacht. If we are to have any visitors, I must be there to receive them. Matapan can remain here for the present. The long boat can return for him by-and-bye and take him ashore. Hasten to the relief of that simpleton over there. If he is left to himself much longer, we shall have two dead men on our hands, instead of one."

Doutrelaise jumped into the boat in which four sturdy men were waiting, oar in hand. To tell the truth, he was not sorry to leave Courtaumer the task of superintending the removal of Matapan's body from the long-boat to the island. The boat flew along like a sea-gull, and Doutrelaise, seated at the stern, had nothing to do but keep the rudder straight, and watch the dangerous manœuvres of the inexperienced navigator to whose assistance he was speeding. The imprudent fellow was evidently rushing to destruction, for the wind was driving him towards the rough and jagged rocks around Green Island. Two or three times, he had attempted to put about, but he did so, so clumsily, that his sail proved a hindrance rather than a help. He now seemed to have renounced all hope of changing his course, and apparently made no effort to guide his frail craft. The catastrophe which was inevitable under such circumstances soon occurred. A powerful wave dashed his boat upon a large rock ; it turned a kind of somersault in the air, and the next moment its unfortunate occupant was struggling in the waves. "Good God ! he is overboard !" cried Doutrelaise. "Pull, my good fellows, pull, we may save him yet."

"If he's a good swimmer there is still a chance for him, but the current is very strong there," muttered one of the sailors. "But I have lost sight of him !—he has gone down !" he added.

"Then he will never rise to the surface again," rejoined Doutrelaise. "He must be some distance off already. Keep on rowing. Don't pause an instant !" They were now only a dozen yards or so from the boat, which was

drifting along, keel uppermost. "There he is ! he has just come to the surface again," cried Albert. "One more pull and we shall reach him."

The moment of hope was short. A wave which had just broken upon the rock again engulfed the drowning man as it recoiled. "We cannot allow him to perish !" exclaimed Doutrelaise, greatly agitated. No one replied. The sailors felt no desire to risk their lives in an attempt to save a Parisian who had only met with what he deserved. There was no one to blame but himself, after all. Why had he not remained on shore—or, if he was so anxious for a sail, why had he not gone with old Guinic, who was an experienced seaman, and who had just rounded the point in safety ? "If you won't save him, I will," cried Albert, and with these words he plunged boldly into the waves. He was an excellent swimmer, but his clothes hampered his movements, and he soon perceived that he had not strength enough to stem the violent current which was bearing him towards Bosseven. His men had instantly put the boat about and were rowing hard to overtake him, but he had already been carried a long distance off. He felt that he himself might be able to reach the rock where Matapan's lifeless form reposed ; but he began to despair of accomplishing the rescue he had so generously attempted, when suddenly a rigid hand caught hold of his coat collar. His courage failed him for a moment. He knew that drowning men never release their hold, and he was afraid that the amateur seaman might clutch one of his arms or legs with his other hand, and thus paralyze his movements. Fortunately, however, the drowning man was almost unconscious, and had exhausted his remaining strength in this final effort. He retained his hold on Albert's collar, but showed no other signs of life. All that Doutrelaise had to do was to keep his head out of the water, and try not to allow the current to carry him much further out, until the boat could overtake him.

"Hold on !" cried the sailors in chorus. He did hold on, and in two or three minutes time the boat was near enough for an oar to be held out to him. Then one of the sailors caught hold of the Parisian amateur by the waistband, another grasped Doutrelaise by the collar, and, with the assistance of two others, lifted them both on board. The half-drowned man was deposited at the bottom of the boat, and when Doutrelaise having somewhat recovered, turned to look at him he was thunderstruck to recognize Julien de la Calprenède. "Is he dead ?" he asked frantically.

"Oh no, sir," replied one of the sailors, who was kneeling beside the unconscious man, and after opening a flask of brandy, he placed it between Julien's parted lips, saying as he did so : "This is the best remedy in the world for gentlemen who have swallowed too much salt-water. All the rubbing in the world won't do as much good as a drink of brandy."

He was right. Scarcely had a few drops of alcohol trickled down Julien's throat, than he started ; whereupon the amateur doctor doubled the dose, and the patient soon opened his eyes. "Where am I ?" he murmured.

"On board a boat whose owner has just rescued you from a very dangerous position, my good sir," replied the sailor.

Just then, young Calprenède perceived Doutrelaise but a few steps from him with a pale face and dripping garments. "You !" he exclaimed, "was it you who—" And such was his emotion that he fainted away again.

"Don't be alarmed," said the seaman, "he will soon be all right again. I will put my jacket over him, and when we get him aboard the yacht we will put him to bed, and make him drink some hot toddy. He will be on his feet again in an hour." Doutrelaise could not reply ; he was literally

speechless with emotion, but the sailor resumed : "The long-boat has already started for the yacht with the captain. We had better do the same, had we not, sir ?"

"Yes, yes, row to the yacht," faltered Albert at last. He was eager to inform Courtaumer of this strange adventure, and he anxiously asked himself what had brought Julien to Bosseven. The young fellow seemed predestined to commit acts of folly. This last one had nearly cost him his life ; the others had nearly cost him his honour ; and although Doutrelaise could reproach himself for having been the involuntary cause of the opal necklace affair, he could also boast of having rescued Julien from certain death. Was not this enough to induce young Calprenède to forgive his former offence ?

Doutrelaise was so troubled in mind that he did not venture to attend the young man himself, nor was it necessary, for the cordial administered to him by the sailor had proved wonderfully efficacious. Julien gradually regained consciousness, and the impromptu doctor, who had begun to rub his patient vigorously, was becoming more and more sure of his speedy recovery. The other sailors were rowing with all possible despatch towards the yacht, and the trip was speedily accomplished.

The yacht was swinging at anchor near old Guinic's boat, which had just been made fast to its stern. There were no strangers on board, however, and Jacques was not to be seen, and Doutrelaise soon discovered why, for the following conversation ensued between one of his men and the boatswain who was waiting for them on the larboard side, "Where is the captain ?" asked the seaman.

"Some relatives from Paris have come to see him," said the boatswain, "and they have gone in search of one of their friends, who insisted upon sailing over alone. He has failed to arrive however."

"We have brought him with us. His boat capsized, and we picked him up. Come down and help us to get him aboard. I suppose there are some ladies, as you have lowered the gangway ?"

"Two of them," answered the boatswain.

This reply made Albert's heart throb violently. He did not know what course to pursue, for although he longed to rejoin Jacques, he did not like to leave Julien.

Fortunately, the latter had in a great measure recovered his strength and he now managed to raise himself up and say in a husky voice : "Just steady me a little, and I can get up the ladder without being carried."

The sailors did not obey him to the letter, but grasped him under both arms, and with their aid he was able to climb on board. Doutrelaise also climbed up in turn, but he was overwhelmed with consternation. Arlette's brother had shown no disposition to thank him, or even to speak to him. Perhaps he did not yet realize that he owed his life to Doutrelaise ; perhaps he had not even seen him. Indeed, Julien fainted again as soon as he set foot on deck. The effort he had made had been too much for him. He was carried into Courtaumer's cabin and put to bed, and Doutrelaise had just decided to address him by name when the boatswain, who had followed our hero, whispered : "The captain is expecting you on shore."

"I'm going," replied Doutrelaise. "Did he witness the accident ?"

"No ; the boat must have struck on one of the rocks at the other end of the island, which can't been seen from this point ; but the captain apprehended some trouble, and he was very anxious. He told me to ask you to join him as soon as possible. But, you have been in the water too, sir.

It would, perhaps, be better for you to change your clothes before you go."

"That isn't necessary," replied Doutrelaise, although he was shivering with the cold. "See that this young man is well cared for. I leave him in your charge. One of the sailors will suffice to take me to the island."

"Very well, sir. You need have no fears about the Parisian; in an hour's time he will quite have forgotten his bath."

Doutrelaise hurried on deck, leaped into the boat which was awaiting him, and in another moment he had landed on the island and was climbing the rocky slope. On reaching the summit of the hill, he espied some distance in advance of him a group composed of several persons, among whom he could distinguish a couple of ladies. He hurried towards them, and soon saw a man leave the group and hasten to meet him. It was Jacques, who, when within speaking distance, cried out: "Where is Julien?"

"Saved!" replied Doutrelaise, who was panting with fatigue and emotion. "I jumped into the water after him, and was fortunate enough to get him out, but at one moment I thought we were both going to drown."

"Did you take him to the yacht?"

"Yes. He is out of danger, but he has not forgiven me."

"He had better do so, although by capsizing his boat he did you a great service, unconsciously, it is true. Would you believe it? the simpleton thought he could come to Bosseven alone, he who had never sailed a boat in his life! Ah, you will be cordially received, I assure you. His father and sister think him dead. They have just seen the boat drifting about."

"His father and sister! What, are they here?"

"Yes, and my aunt accompanies them. Look, they are running towards us as fast as they can."

Doutrelaise felt almost ready to faint, but Jacques caught hold of his hand and dragged him along. "My son! have you seen my son?" exclaimed M. de la Calprenède.

"He will dine with us this evening," replied Courtaumer, gaily. "But if this good fellow had not plunged into the sea after him, we should never have seen him again."

"What, sir," stammered the count, "is it to you that I am indebted—"

"If you doubt it you have only to look at him. He reminds me forcibly of a Triton," said Courtaumer, laughing.

Doutrelaise said nothing, but Arlette was there and he ventured to give her a timid glance. "I knew you would save him," she murmured.

"Well, well," exclaimed Madame de Vervins, who although the last to come up, had heard everything, "so here you are, sir, you who so shamelessly desert your partners at whist! Still, I suppose I must forgive you as you have saved Julien. But give me your arm, I am quite exhausted."

And she caught hold of the arm of our hero, whose presence of mind seemed to have entirely deserted him. Mademoiselle de la Calprenède and her father were already some distance in advance, for they were anxious to reach the yacht, and see Julien. Before doing so, however, Arlette had found time to thank her lover with a look into which she threw her whole soul.

"Let them run on," said the marchioness to Doutrelaise; "I am not equal to any further achievements in that line, and I wish to talk with you. You scarcely expected to see me here, did you? I came merely to help you a little. At my age, one leaves home only to serve one's friends. Oh, no compliments! You are my nephew's friend, and consequently mine, and between us, we are going to marry you. You start—you can't believe in

so much happiness. Nevertheless, it is an accomplished fact. Yes, sir, you shall marry Arlette. Calprenède will grant you his daughter's hand this evening. Who shall ask it for you? You think perhaps that I mean to do so. Not at all; it will be Jacques. And do you know how he will set about it?"

"No, madame," faltered Doutrelaise. "And I confess I doubt—"

"His success? You are wrong. Listen to me. The millions are found, are they not? and Calprenède will owe his immense fortune to my nephew, who is his partner both in justice and in fact—to my nephew, who might rightly claim one half of the money. But Jacques won't do so. He took his precautions. He made the count promise to give him any reward he might ask for, but he did not specify the nature of his recompense. So this very day he will go to the count, and say something like this to him: 'I have enriched you, sir, and I entreat you, and if need be, I require you to unite Mademoiselle de la Calprenède to my most intimate friend, Albert Doutrelaise, who loves her to distraction, and whom she loves with all her heart in return.' Come, do you still doubt his success? Why, you simpleton, you forget that you have just saved Julien's life. A father would be heartless to refuse your offer after that. You will be married in two months, my boy. It is I who tell you so; and your romance will end like all fairy tales. You will marry, and live happily every afterwards. I don't wish to boast, but you will soon see what a valiant champion you have in me—on one condition, however, that you'll help me to find Jacques as perfect a wife as Madame Arlette Doutrelaise will be."

E P I L O G U E.

SIX weeks have elapsed since the memorable day when Matapan's dead body was found in the depths of the sea, and Julien was rescued from the waves. All the money has not been yet recovered, but there are already nine millions on board the yacht, and the other two will soon follow them, for Jacques de Courtaumer is pressing forward the work, as he wishes to be back in Paris before the end of February, so as to be present at Albert's marriage, which will, perhaps, be solemnized before Lent. It may be found necessary to defer it until Easter, however, for Mademoiselle de la Calprenède has scarcely recovered from the trying ordeal to which she was subjected on Green Island. What cruel and sweet emotions she experienced there! Between the rising and the setting of the January sun, Arlette passed from the bitterest grief to the most intense joy. In the morning, she believed that her brother was dead, and in the evening that same brother, rescued from the waves, united with Jacques de Courtaumer and Madame de Vervins in conquering the opposition of the Count de la Calprenède, who still hesitated about bestowing his daughter's hand on a suitor who, whatever his good qualities, had not been born a nobleman. Julien's foolish animosity toward his preserver had already vanished. In those moments when he was so near death, the truth was revealed to him, and when his eyes again opened to the sunlight, they opened to reason as well. The once incorrigible youth will soon give incontestable proof of his thorough reformation, for, directly his sister's marriage has taken place, he will enlist in a regiment of cavalry bound for Africa; and there is all the more merit in this atonement, as he will some day inherit a very large fortune.

Matapan's body lies in the graveyard at Porsal. As one may readily be

lieve, his death made a great stir in Brittany and in Paris. The authorities of Brest began an investigation which was continued in the capital, and which led to some curious discoveries, but not to the arrest of the murderer. A warrant was certainly issued against the Englishman who had occupied the house with the green shutters, but, as Courtaumer had foreseen, the scoundrel decamped immediately after committing the crime, taking a chestful of gold away with him. The air-pump and the other implements used by himself and his friend were discovered in one of the subterranean vaults of Trémazan Castle. The assassin was tracked from Porsal to Brest, and from Brest to Paris, but there all trace of him was lost. No clue to his whereabouts was discovered until a week or so ago, when the worthy commissary of police, who had rendered Doutrelaise such valuable assistance when he was unjustly accused, received orders to make a careful inspection of the house on the Boulevard Haussmann. On searching Matapan's rooms, the secret cupboard in the wall was found to be empty. The baron had evidently placed his gold and jewels in a safer place prior to his departure. At last the cellars were searched, and in the lowest of them, behind an iron door, and among heaps of valuables and coins of all kinds and countries, lay a lifeless form, terribly mutilated by rats. Doutrelaise at once recognized it as the corpse of the pretended Englishman—of the former pirate, Giromon. His sudden disappearance was now explained. He had stolen the key of the cellar in which Matapan had deposited his valuables, and on his arrival at Paris had gone straight to the Boulevard Haussmann, but although he had managed to enter the cellar, he had not been able to leave it. The door was furnished with a spring-lock, and to open it from the inside it was necessary to be acquainted with the secret of another lock. Giromon was ignorant of this, and so he must have died of starvation. What did he do with the gold he abstracted from the depths of the sea? No one can say as yet. Perhaps it will be found some day in a trunk left at a railway station or some boarding-house. Could the ex-pirate have managed to effect an entrance into the baron's apartments without the assistance of the doorkeeper and the valet? It is hard to believe it, but it is even more difficult to prove their complicity. Besides, as soon as the news of their employer's death was received, the two men made hasty preparations for departure.

Marchefroid abandoned his quarters near the door of the house for a pretty suite of rooms at Batignolles, where he lives on his income. He has changed from a Radical to an Opportunist republican, and it is reported that the lodge of Freemasons to which he belongs will soon elect him Master. This is a first step towards political honours. His daughter, the beautiful Lélia, has secured him this leisure and this comparative luxury. M. Bourleroy, senior, still admires her, and Anatole, who is aware of the parental delinquencies, takes advantage of the situation to extort money from his father in the most shameless manner. With plenty of cash at his command, the young rascal shrinks from nothing. He gets drunk every night in the week, is turned out almost every time he goes to the theatre, and is shunned like the plague at the club. His sister Hermine is now about to marry a druggist who has retired from business with a handsome fortune. She nearly died of chagrin when she learned that Arlette was to have a dowry of two millions, and for a time it was feared that jaundice would set in.

Ali, the civilized Malay, has found a situation worthy of his merits. He has entered the service of a dentist who practises his calling during the summer months at country fairs, and Ali is preparing himself for his new

position by studying the trombone, in order to accompany his master. He did not mourn for the baron, but he regrets he was unable to rob him.

The Marchioness de Vervins is unspeakably happy. She has found the best of husbands for her dear Arlette, and believing that a good example is contagious, she does not despair of persuading Jacques to marry. In the meantime, she declares that the trip to the sea-shore has made her feel twenty years younger. She has resumed her evening receptions, and is giving superb dinners to all her old friends. The two old retired officers are both paying assiduous court to her, hoping that she may take it into her head to give the deceased marquis a successor, and she flirts with them in the most shameful manner.

It should be mentioned, moreover, that a strange idea has taken possession of her mind. She declares that somnambulism killed Matapan, that he went to sleep at the bottom of the sea, and woke in another world. The great point is that he is dead, and will never again return to disturb the slumbers of his tenants. Adrien de Courtamer, who has withdrawn his resignation, has not forgiven the baron for having almost compelled him to abandon his functions, and Madame Adrien will always feel rather unkindly towards the Calprenédés, who were the indirect cause of her husband's worry. To console her, the marchioness loads her with presents, and holds long conferences with her notary on the subject of adding a codicil to her will. She also thinks of purchasing the residence of the deceased baron, and presenting it to her nephew Jacques, as a *souvenir* of the campaign which he had conducted so skilfully. And Jacques really deserves some reward, for he has displayed most commendable self-sacrifice and generosity. He has given millions to the count, a charming wife to Doutrelaise, and kept nothing for himself save his freedom and independence, with which he is well content. He hardly cares to become a landlord, especially the landlord of the mansion where Baron Matapan once reigned as master. "It might cause me to become a somnambulist," he remarked the other day in a letter to his aunt, who had written to notify him of her project.

At all events, the house in which all these strange events occurred is to be sold, as well as all the personal property of the baron who left no known heirs. It is still a question, and one that will probably never be answered, whether Matapan was his real or an assumed name. Even Ali is unable to say, for his master confided none of his secrets to him. The property will revert to the State when the time allowed to claimants has expired, and it is more than probable that the trustees will sell everything that is likely to deteriorate or diminish in value.

Madame de Vervins is waiting for the opal necklace, and hopes to live long enough to purchase it, cost what it may, when the day of the sale arrives. She did think of presenting it to Mademoiselle de la Calprenède as a bridal gift, but the baron's affairs are not yet wound up, and the wedding is near at hand. Beside, Albert Doutrelaise, whom she has consulted, is opposed to the plan, for he feels certain that opals bring misfortune.

The marchioness insists that these ones only brought misfortune upon the pirate who stole them from the rajah. But Doutrelaise dislikes them because they remind him of the Matapan affair, and Madame de Vervins would not displease him for the world; so Arlette will have pearls instead.

THE END.

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